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**In a Pickle: African Americans Struggles with Racism and Progress in Mount Olive, North
Carolina, 1930-1955**

An honors thesis presented to the Department of History,
University at Albany, State University of New York in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in
History

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Abstract

This paper examines the experiences of African Americans living in Mount Olive, North Carolina during the 20th century. Life in Mount Olive afforded African Americans a multitude of opportunities such as economic, educational, and access to healthcare. Though African Americans' situation in Mount Olive was better than Black people living in other locations throughout North Carolina, an exodus still occurred in the latter half of the 20th century. I argue African Americans stayed in Mount Olive because of the stability and economic opportunities provided to them by staying post-great migration, but that the persistence of racism and segregation made living there untenable, especially as these opportunities dissipated.

Acknowledgments

In January of 2023, I found out that my grandfather Larry Lamb was not biologically related to my dad and me. This paper was written in an attempt to get closer to my family history and learn about where I came from. Uncovering this scandal was the most damning by far while researching Mount Olive. This event caused so many looming questions surrounding this paper and my motivations to continue; I had felt devastated by the discovery. The following month, I found out that I was going to be a father. Having faced challenges and obstacles throughout this year, I would have never been able to keep going if it was not for my family. I would like to thank my Fiancée, Jasmine, my mom, my dad, Michael, my grandfather, and my sisters for all the love and support. I would also like to thank Dr. Michitake Aso, Dr. Jennifer Burns, and Dr. Kendra Smith-Howard for giving me counsel this whole year in writing this paper.

In loving memory of Elnora Wallace

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Pickle Battles in Wayne County	5
Health Services	13
Education	15
Economics	21
Migration	24
Homes for Sale	31
Conclusion	34
Bibliography	36

Figures

Figure 1. <i>Map of Wayne County</i>	5
Figure 2. <i>Olive Leaves</i> [1960]	30
Figure 3. <i>Olive Leaves</i> [1963]	31

Introduction

North Carolina has a deep history of African American people; African Americans have been in the area since the colonization of the Carolinas. North Carolina has long claimed to be the most progressive state in the South, even having thriving Black Communities during the Jim Crow Era.¹ These thriving communities were in clusters scattered throughout the state, mainly in the Piedmont Region (Raleigh-Durham area).

North Carolina holds a special place in my heart; my family has been in the state for several centuries. Mount Olive is my paternal family's hometown, and they have lived in this small town for several generations. Although they have been there for several generations, we know little about our family history and where we came from. This is because most of us have been separated from our fathers due to incarceration, and custody arrangements. As a result, we have been stripped of the stories of the past. This paper is an attempt to uncover the untold history that awaits in Mount Olive, North Carolina.

Mount Olive was unique, in that I have heard countless stories about its glory days during the 1940s and 1950s. These stories started to become strange to me the more I started to learn about segregation and racism. Mount Olive was located in the Jim Crow South so how come these elderly Black people had stories of having a good life? This is what led me to research the happening of Black people between 1930 and 1955. My findings have led me to argue: African Americans stayed in Mount Olive, enduring segregation and racism, because of the stability and economic opportunities provided to them by staying post-great migration. Once these opportunities dissipated, large amounts of African Americans started to leave the small town.

¹ Brown, Leslie. *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South*. The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009. 309.

This paper includes a mixture of primary and secondary sources; with primary sources being heavily utilized compared to the latter. The most helpful primary source was the 1940 Census data; I was able to access this census through *Ancestry.com*. *Ancestry* has tools that have allowed this paper to be as detailed as possible. Through the features of *Ancestry*, the application possesses the ability to read and decipher the spelling of the faded lettering on the records, saving countless amounts of time. The Census data allowed me to discover the story of Maude Kornegay and her hand in helping the community during her elder stages of life. These records provided information on income, housing, education, and occupation. Through observing the Census, I found that in some cases skilled African Americans were making twice as much as White citizens during the 1940s. The Census record also illustrated the racial segregation in the town. The railroad track that is placed in the middle of Mount Olive, acted as the marker for racial division. A collection of Billeanial Reports are also used, these Principal Reports discuss each year's enrollment, grades, passing rate, and income of teachers.

Mount Olive's School for African Americans, Carver High School, and Mount Olive High (White institution) also have a collection of yearbooks ranging from the 1940s to the 1950s.

A collection of interviews conducted in 2022 and 2023 have aided in understanding the history of Mount Olive. Lynn Williams works at the Mount Olive Pickle Company and heads their Public Relations and unofficial "historian". She has spent two decades researching paper documents left in the basement of the company. She has revealed useful information in writing about the company. Relatives and local Mount Olive residents were also interviewed when I traveled to the town in January.

The *Mount Olive Tribune* (MOT) is the local newspaper of Mount Olive which has collections that date back to the 19th century. The State Archives of North Carolina is home to

hundreds, if not thousands, of documents significant to the state, and the country. The MOT was, and still is the local newspaper for the town of Mount Olive. The Tribune is only accessible through North Carolina's state archive, the Tribune with records dating back to the late 19th century. Due to the lack of time and accessibility, the Tribune papers being reviewed for this paper date between 1939 and 1955. How the White community viewed Black people, is very telling in their editorial pieces. Black people were silenced, and forgotten within the MOT, until the rise of a Black presence in the community in the early fifties.

The beginning of the paper discusses the origins of the Mount Olive Pickle Company and a comparison of one of their competitors, and an observer where MOPC succeeded, and their competitor failed. *Thrown Away*, a novel by Linda Flowers, helped contextualize Eastern North Carolina. The novel specifically focused on Faison, N.C., the location of MOPC's competitor, Cates Pickle Manufacturing Company. An article titled *Cates, Charles Fletcher* by Charles Ingram is also utilized, it gives a history of Cates. "Propaganda" given by Lynn Williams was also used to understand the MOPC narrative on how they want to be seen by the Public.

When discussing the health services provided to African Americans in Mount Olive, newspaper clippings and books were used in discovering Rivera's clinic. Phoebe Pollitt's *African American Hospitals in North Carolina* includes a clinic, opened by a Latino immigrant Tomas Rivera, in Mount Olive in the 1920s.

A key source that will be used in this thesis is *E-Qual-ity Education in North Carolina Among Negroes* by H.V. Brown. When alive, Brown was a prominent educator in Goldsboro and greater Wayne County. In his book, he writes about each State Superintendent for North Carolina and their terms in office. Brown reviewed their policies and contributions to the African American population in North Carolina, up until 1952. *Greater than Equal African American*

Struggles for Schools and Citizenship in North Carolina, 1919-1965 discussed the struggles African American students had to face while seeking higher education, beyond a High School diploma. During that time, disputes amongst scholars about whether education truly was being improved, sparked throughout the state and country. Scholars such as Brown, state that though not all was accomplished, a great amount of progress was made during this Jim Crow Era.² While others such as Carry F. Malone, suggest the government did little to aid in improving Black education.³

A possible downside of certain secondary sources included in this thesis is that it has a bias. For example, the pamphlets that tell the history of Mount Olive Pickle Company are made by MOPC, so they control the information that is provided to the public. The same can even be true in books like *A Short History of Mount Olive College* by Burkette Raper, a Professor at Mount Olive College. The area in which I have decided to study has not yet been researched by any other scholars before. I am the first to truly uncover the history of Mount Olive in the modern world; primary sources are heavily used in this paper because of that fact.

² Brown, Hugh Victor. *E-Qual-Ity Education in North Carolina Among Negroes*. Raleigh, North Carolina: Irving-Swain Press, Inc., 1964. 130-140.

³ Malone, Carry F. "Before Brown: Cultural and Social Capital in a Rural Black School Community, W. E. B. DuBois High School, Wake Forest, North Carolina." *North Carolina Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (October 2008): 425.

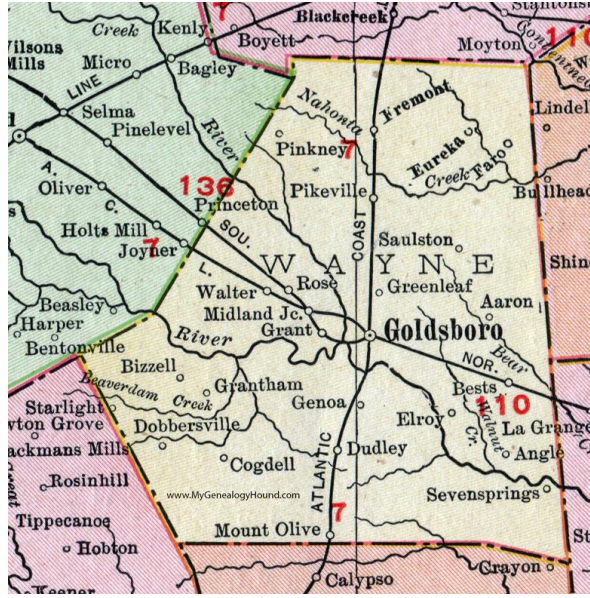


Figure 1. *Map of Wayne County.*⁴

Pickle Battles in Wayne County

Mount Olive, in Wayne and Duplin County, North Carolina, sits on flat, fertile land, with swaths of fields surrounding the open road. The crops that are grown in this area are primarily tobacco, wheat, and cucumbers. The aroma of Wayne County consumes your nostrils with the scent of manure, this smell is constant no matter where you go in the area. The people here are historically farmers and agricultural workers.

Before cucumbers, Mount Olive was famous for their strawberries. The strawberry industry was set in motion/fostered the transportation developments and focus on serving non-local markets that would become significant in the twentieth century. During the late 19th

⁴ “Wayne County, North Carolina, 1911, Map, Rand McNally, Goldsboro, Fremont, Mt. Olive, Pikeville, Seven Springs, Dudley.” Accessed May 26, 2023. <https://www.mygenealogyhound.com/maps/North-Carolina-Maps/NC-Wayne-County-North-Carolina-Map-1911-Rand-McNally.html#>. Fig. 1.

century. Mount Olive was home to the largest strawberry farm in the south: the farm of W.S. Cheney and Mr. Speakman founded in 1872.⁵ Eight years later they invited another associate who was a nurseryman in Goldsboro, J.A. Westbrook to also cultivate strawberries in the flat town. Westbrook revolutionized strawberry production and was responsible for the company becoming the largest strawberry producer in the South. Westbrook is also known for developing the concept of truck framing, the act of loading trucks with produce and then transporting said produce from town-to-town, on a wide scale. Metaphorically, Westbrook walked so MOPC could run; trucks were an innovation that enhanced the distribution speeds for farmers, and the railroad that ran across the middle of Mount Olive also revolutionized production.⁶ Transportation and suitable land established the groundwork for the idea of Mount Olive Pickle Company.

The success of Westbrook's business attracted produce brokers into the town of Mount Olive, the first of which were English and Oliver Produce.

Reports in 1907 indicated that 60,000 barrels of Irish potatoes, 6-7,000 barrels of cotton, and 60-70,000 crates of strawberries came through Mount Olive annually- and it all shipped out by train.⁷

In 1931, Mount Olive made further advancements with the sale of agricultural products in the town, establishing a produce auction market directed by the Chamber of Commerce. The late 19th century marked a pivotal point for the future of Mount Olive. This opportunistic future was in large part due to new produce markets and the innovations of truck farming. This allowed for grandiose housing, sprawling businesses, and an overall booming economy before the establishment of MOPC.

⁵ Williams, Lynn. Interview Conducted by Lamb, D. (Jan 2023).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Williams, Lynn. "The Story of Mount Olive." Lecture. March 1, 2022.

The railroad tracks exported produce from that took produce out of Mount Olive divided the town demographically. The railroad track in between the town divided not only race but also divided class. On one side of the railroads lived middle and upper-class White families who had little interaction with African Americans outside of the workplace. In smaller towns such as Faison, North Carolina, Black, and White people lived near each other.

By the 1940s-roughly a third of the population of Mount Olive consisted of African Americans with the rest being nearly all Caucasians.⁸ While the tracks were a physical line, it was also a permeable one. In rural communities like Mount Olive, segregation proved to be a difficult task, since it was almost unavoidable to not interact with another race. In *Threwed Away*, Linda Flowers states that the relationships between Blacks and Whites were similar to the relationships between the rich and poor. “Where life still is essentially rural, unless they live well inside one of the larger towns, rich and poor - and Black and White - aren’t likely to escape the sight of one another.”⁹ Mount Olive is one of the bigger towns that had a semblance of division between the two races.

For towns that surrounded Mount Olive, such as Faison, Mount Olive acted as a commercial and business hub.¹⁰ When it came to shopping Mount Olive was a probable place to browse if a person did not want to travel to Goldsboro or Raleigh.

Other rural towns shared many of the same economic trends as Mount Olive; for example, Faison, a tiny portion of land, only covering less than one square mile of territory, had the most similarities to Mount Olive. The town has a significantly lower Black population compared to Mount Olive and Goldsboro. Originally Faison was nothing but a Depot station,

⁸ Year 1940; Census Place: Mount Olive, Wayne, North Carolina; Roll: m-t0627-02986; Enumeration District: 96-2

⁹ Flowers, Linda. *Threwed Away: Failures of Progress in Eastern North Carolina*. 1st ed. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 4.

named Faison Depot, it ran along the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad. In 1872 Elias Faison was successful in incorporating it as Faison Depot, Faison was able to do this because of his wealth.¹¹

Around 1900, Mount Olive farmers sent their cucumbers to Faison. In 1898 Charles Fletcher Cates established the Cates Pickle Manufacturing Company in Faison.¹² In the early twentieth century, Cates remained the most significant pickle company in the Duplin and Wayne counties. The Public Relations Manager of Mount Olive Pickle Company, Lynn Williams, said in an interview that Cates specialized in selling their goods to commercial businesses. Cates did not grow cucumbers themselves, instead, they would purchase cucumbers from neighboring farmers in areas such as Mount Olive and turn those cucumbers into pickles.

While Mount Olive's pickles were welcome in Faison, Mount Olive's African American residents were not. The citizens of Faison generally were not welcoming to Black people in the surrounding area. When White employers needed hands for their farms they would often go to Mount Olive, Clinton, or Warsaw and dub these areas *Nigger town* picking them up in the morning and dropping them off at the end of the day.¹³

Faison's people also suffered from these harsh social realities. People of Faison were impoverished, Flowers recounts, that reality did not set in about their conditions until outsiders came to visit. In *Thrown Away*, Flowers explained that for people in Faison "Only when the health people came around were you made to remember such imperfections as poverty could cause."¹⁴ The health conditions of the locals were significantly worse than for the rest of North

¹¹ Proffitt, Martie. "Local History Offers Tasty Tidbits." *Star-News*, April 17, 1983.

¹² Ingram, Charles Fletcher. "Cates, Charles Fletcher | NCpedia," 1979.
<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/cates-charles-fletcher>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 19.

Carolina and the United States. Most Faison people were tenants and farmers; very few of them owned property of their own, instead having to pay off their landlord as they cultivate the field.

In the 1920s, Faison's pickle company got a new competitor. According to the accounts of the Mount Olive Pickle Company, Twenty-six years later Shikrey Baddour, a Lebanese immigrant residing in Goldsboro (15 miles from Mt. Olive), passed through Mount Olive. While he was driving through the town he noticed the large amounts of rotting cucumbers in the fields. This was because there was an excess of cucumbers being grown, which resulted in multitudes of cucumbers going to waste. Baddour saw this as a business opportunity, he planned to brine the cucumbers and sell them to pickle companies. With the aid of George Moore and I.F. Witherington, he was able to purchase the excess cucumbers from farmers. Cates was one of the pickle companies Baddour would attempt to sell to. Baddour, with the help of the city of Goldsboro, commissioned George Moore to build brine tanks along South Center Street in Mount Olive. This business model lasted until 1925 when he and his partners mutually agreed the concept was not sustainable.¹⁵

A year later Baddour and his associates decided that rather than selling their cucumber to pickle companies, it would be more profitable if they grew their cucumber and opened a pickle company themselves. Mount Olive's businessmen saw promise in Baddour's vision and wanted to be a part of his business project. The board purchased one acre of land for \$1,000, which is still in use by the company today. On February 25, 1926, twenty-one investors purchased \$15,000 in capital stock with the branding "Carolina Beauty". By the end of 1928, sales for the company reached \$50,944. I.F. Witherington stepped down from his position as company president in 1928 and was assigned as secretary-treasurer. "In that role, Mr. Witherington ran the

¹⁵ "Mt. Olive 90 Years of Dill-Licious and Still Growing." *Mount Olive Pickle Co.* Mount Olive, N.C, 2016.

https://www.mtolivepickles.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MOP.CC.062716.g.Web_.pdf

company until he died in 1955.”¹⁶ Four years later Mount Olive Pickle Company (MOPC) still had a small workforce, only fourteen employees were on the payroll, working for 25 cents an hour. The company had such a low number of employees that during the late twenties and early thirties, investors would be the ones working in the factory producing their products.¹⁷ It was not until the 1940s and 50s that their workforce expanded, and a generous portion of Mount Olive residents held employment there.¹⁸

The Mount Olive Pickle Company rarely featured any form of advertisement with the MOT. The only advertisement that was displayed in the newspaper was a help wanted sign on February 20, 1940. It read “Farmers to grow cucumbers under contract. If interested see Mount Olive Co.”¹⁹ This was the only call to help MOPC made in sixteen years, which is quite surprising since ten years prior, twenty employees were working at the company. Interestingly, Cates Pickle Manufacturing Company had more coverage in the news compared to the Mount Olive Pickle Company. This is interesting because despite MOPC being the company on the rise, very little mention of them was in the news; with the former, Faison, declining despite their presence in the media.

By the 1950s, Cates still had the system in place where they would rent the work of farmers. At the beginning of the season, Cates would purchase a half-acre worth one and a half acres worth of grown cucumbers and buy the cucumbers at an agreed-upon price. Cates was interested in community building surrounding Faison, North Carolina. On April 13, 1951, The newspaper, *The Robesonian* reported that Cates was opening a pickle market called St. Pauls Pickle Market. This market served as a trade center for cucumber farmers, who would now be

¹⁶ Williams, Lynn. Interview Conducted by Lamb, D. (Jan 2023).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Help Wanted.” *Mount Olive Tribune*. February 20, 1940. North Carolina State Archives.

able to sell and buy produce throughout the market. It seemed to the majority of people in the 1940s and 1950s, that Cates was winning the battle of public perception in the South.

In 1943, the Mount Olive Pickle Company decided to enact its profit-sharing program. Williams stated in her interview that I.F. Witherington started his program due to his workers asking for money outside of their salary due to emergencies. She said that he wanted his workers to have a way to make extra money and feel like they were contributing to a bigger picture, by having a stake in the company.²⁰

Ray Scarborough was impactful in the economic success of MOPC in Northeast markets during the 1950s. MOPC expanding its markets allowed for MOPC to enact policies for their employees during the 1940s and 1950s. Scarborough was an American baseball player who was born in Mount Gilead, North Carolina located in the Southern Piedmont Region of the state. In 1940 he would marry Edna Martin, an Home Economics teacher; she also was a relative to a board member for MOPC.²¹ Unknowingly this was arguably fundamental for MOPC and Scarborough, in the late 40s he became a sales representative for the MOPC.

During a baseball player's offseason during the mid-20th century, they were often required to pick up a second job. Ray Scarborough, worked for MOPC through a connection with his wife. At the pickle company, Scarborough was a sales representative. Initially in his career, Scarborough was used sporadically by Washington.

In 1950 he signed with the New York Yankees and would win the World Series the same season. While in New York, the press learned about Scarborough's antics during the offseason. The media loved the fact that Scarborough lived in Mount Olive and worked for a pickle company. These newspaper articles about Scarborough made him and MOPC more recognizable

²⁰ Williams, Lynn. Interview Conducted by Lamb, D. (Jan 2023).

²¹ Ibid.

to a Northeastern audience. During this time MOPC was still a regional company that was only selling in markets in Virginia, Florida, North, and South Carolina.²² In the media, they labeled Scarborough “the pitching pickle peddler.”²³ The exposure that Scarborough received as “the pitching pickle peddler” allowed the pickle company to sell in markets in New York and Massachusetts around the same time that these newspapers were being released.²⁴ Scarborough was able to aid the Mount Olive Pickle Company through the latter half of his career, from the media’s depiction of him in Editorial cartoons. The markets opening in the Northeast allowed MOPC to make greater profits than their previous years. Selling in New York and Massachusetts allowed MOPC to be able to maintain beneficial programs for their employees. The progress made in the late 40s and early 50s increased the profit sharing for employees, making employment at Mount Olive one of the most valuable during the mid-20th century in the town.

With I.F. Witherington’s 1943 profit-sharing program for his employees, MOPC became one of the first 200 companies to do so. The company invested \$5,799 in its first year.²⁵ Over the next twenty years, the investment grew immensely.²⁶ During the mid-1950s as well the MOPC continued adding benefits for their employees, creating a tuition reimbursement program for workers who wanted to further their education and remain with the company.²⁷ While MOPC was winning in employee-to-employer relations and expansion to further markets, Cates was focusing on building consumer loyalty on a local scale during the 1940s. The methodology that

²² Ibid.

²³ Siegel, Arthur. “Gamest Team Will Win – Doerr,” *Boston Traveler*, July 23, 1951: 23.

²⁴ Williams, Lynn. Interview Conducted by Lamb, D. (Jan 2023).

²⁵ “Mt. Olive 90 Years of Dill-Licious and Still Growing.” *Mount Olive Pickle Co.* Mount Olive, N.C, 2016.

https://www.mtolivepickles.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MOP.CC.062716.g.Web_.pdf

²⁶ Williams, Lynn. Interview Conducted by Lamb, D. (Jan 2023).

²⁷ Ibid.

MOPC was operating under proved to be more viable in the long run, because it is no longer an independent company in operation.

These were the accounts of the Mount Olive Pickle Company and its spokesperson, but in reality, the policies that were enacted during the 1940s and 1950s were not as advantageous as they may have seemed for workers then compared to how we view the accomplishments today. Lynn Williams states that the reason I.F. Witherington added profit-sharing was because his workers had unforeseen expenses; especially medical bills. The program was used to solve salary issues that started to show in the 1940s when in reality they should have focused on increasing salary as well.

Health Services

Until 1916, Mount Olive's African American residents lacked access to sufficient medical care in the community. Wayne County's first general hospital, Wayne County Memorial Hospital opened in 1896; during the first half of the twentieth century, only White patients were allowed entry to healthcare services.¹ Until 1916 African Americans who needed health care in Wayne County had to travel to Wilson, which was unreasonable for the people because it was nearly forty miles away from Mount Olive. In the days of horse and buggy, traveling forty miles for a person already having medical problems created even more serious problems.²⁸

The small number of training facilities for African American doctors contributed to these medical inequalities. The creation of Menharry Medical College was of absolute importance after the Civil War because it offered training for African Americans to become doctors. Menharry Medical School was the only medical school that educated African Americans in the

²⁸ Pollitt, Phoebe Ann. *African American Hospitals in North Carolina: 39 Institutional Histories, 1880-1967*. Illustrated edition. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2017. 135.

Southern region of America. The only other Medical School that admitted Black students was Howard University, in Washington D.C.²⁹ During this time in the South, there was a crisis to find African American physicians to treat recently freed people. Therefore, schools like Meharry and Howard needed to operate to aid the Black population.

Meharry medical college helped end the racial inequalities in health care that had affected Mount Olive. One of its graduates was Tomas Monte Rivera – a Latino from Puerto Rico, who moved to Alabama after graduating from High School. While in Alabama he attended the Tuskegee Institute, after completion, he then participated in Leonard Medical School, located in Raleigh, and ultimately graduated from Meharry Medical School in Nashville, Tennessee in 1915. Upon graduation, Rivera received his residency in Brooklyn, NY, and Raleigh, NC.

In 1916 Dr. Rivera opened the Rivera Clinic in Mount Olive. Rivera's existence was a confusion for most North Carolinians, and the rest of the Southern Region, in a time when life was only Black and White in the United States. The United States government deemed Rivera to be a colored person lumping him in with African Americans. Rivera chose a place like Mount Olive because it was imperative for local Black communities to receive healthcare.³⁰ Dr. Rivera operated in Mount Olive for over forty years and was a prominent figure in Eastern Carolina. It was not until 1965 when Rivera died, that healthcare services were racially integrated in Wayne County. Rivera played a pivotal role in the health and safety of Mount Olive residents and the entire African American community in the Wayne County area.

One of the homes that have been historically preserved by the state was the estate of Dr. Rivera. In 1927, Rivera built the home himself. Dr. Rivera was determined to succeed – building

²⁹ Watson, Wilbur H. *Against the Odds: Blacks in the Profession of Medicine in the United States*. Transaction Publishers, 1999. 26.

³⁰ Pollitt. *African American Hospitals in North Carolina*. 135.

his own home at 805 South Center Street, and a hospital to treat his patients that stood at 811 South Center Street. Generations later, community members sought to document Dr. Rivera's influence by nominating it for the National Register of Historic Places.³¹ In 1925, Rivera's clinic was rebuilt, and it would remain in operation until its end.

Dr. Rivera allowed for a unique experience for an African American living in Mount Olive and the surrounding areas. This is because, unlike other African American communities in Eastern North Carolina, they had direct access to healthcare in their town during segregation.

Education

The South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong; for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent.

Nevertheless, men strive to know.³² ~ Du Bois.

By the 1920s there was a major emphasis on education for African Americans in the United States. The rhetoric of Booker T. Washington was no longer the main concern for the majority of African Americans in the country. Washington believed that Blacks should have focused their attention on learning trades and becoming farmers. By this time, most Black people shared the beliefs of W.E.B Du Bois, in that education was essential for "Negro" freedom. Although most African American adults had little to no education, they were still outspoken about their children receiving a proper education.³³

³¹ Ibid.

³² Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Gorham, Maine: Myers Education Press, 2018. 29.

³³ Brown. *E-Qual-Ity Education in North Carolina Among Negroes*. 123.

H.V. Brown explained that the effort for the improvement of Negro education started in the 20s by the state government. Progress for Colored students in North Carolina started when Clyde Erwin became the State Superintendent in 1934.³⁴ When he came into office, one of the first things that Erwin did was review documents and records on the state of Black education; these records were from the previous superintendent before him. In 1930, Blacks in North Carolina made up 29% of the state's population, and over 20% of them were illiterate in the state.³⁵ Erwin concluded that African American students in North Carolina had poor attendance, low course grades, and a short school year. However, he did note that the gap between the races was rapidly being abridged.³⁶

One of the first things Erwin wanted was an educated staff; he wanted all children in North Carolina regardless of race to be taught by a college-educated teacher. In the 1920s, the majority of Black teachers had nothing more than an elementary level of education, and most Black children in North Carolina had little education, most only advancing to the third or fourth grade.

Erwin also made textbooks available for all students attending elementary school. There was a rental program created for High School students, however, it is noted that Erwin did not support this, instead, he would have preferred if all age ranges were able to have free books.

The success of Erwin's time in office produced great progress for African Americans and North Carolina, but the reality was that this was not enough. After the efforts of Erwin, the state deemed that all Negro High Schools had a satisfactory level of education. By the 1930s Mount Olive had an established colored school, named Carver High School. Though it no longer exists, during its time it was considered one of the better Colored schools in North Carolina and the

³⁴ Brown. *E-Qual-Ity Education in North Carolina Among Negroes*. 122.

³⁵ Poole. "“Could My Dark Hands Break through the Dark Shadow?” 351.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 124.

South. African American students that wanted to pursue higher education were most likely unable to because there were only seven Negro schools that were able to eligible for their students to enroll in colleges and universities; one of which was Carver High School.³⁷ In addition to that blaring issue for African American education; funding for Negro schools was a battle at most times as well, this was especially true for the Black children in the Piedmont region.³⁸

Black communities were often imposed with a form of a “double tax” when trying to improve their community. A double tax is when a community not only has to pay taxes but is also held responsible for funding its civic services. In her article, Malone describes Black schools during the 1940s and 1950s receiving substantially less funding compared to White schools. To balance that, PTAs were required in the Black community because Black parents were required to invest money into their schools if they wanted their children to have a better education. The apparent lack of funding was an issue during the mid-20th century for Black schools.³⁹

The double taxation allowed for the boost of White supremacy; Blacks were expected to pay for a teacher's salary through this double tax, to maintain the operation of the school. If they were unable to pay for it then it would prove that Blacks were not responsible enough to improve their children’s lives. On December 19, 1939, Carver High School (the local school in Mount Olive) was completely burned down one Friday morning. Students discovered flames bursting through a basement ventilator. The three kids quickly rushed for help, getting in contact with the fire department. The inferno caused severe damage to the Black community; the damage was estimated to cost about \$45,000 (which today would be nearly one million dollars). Nothing

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Malone. “Before Brown.” 425.

³⁹ Ibid. 436.

remained in the fire; the 14-room building lost all of its supplies. Unlike other Colored schools in the South, the government aided Carver after their school burned down.

The double taxation of African Americans was less impactful in Mount Olive than it was in other cities in North Carolina, like Raleigh. The Wayne County Board of Education only partially covered the losses that were endured that Friday morning. The Principal of Carver, C.H. McLendon, decided to resume school on January 1, 1940, at locations off-campus. His plan of action was to still give African American children a proper education. Three-hundred and seventy-seven students were to resume their schooling in two of the Black churches in the town and a public hall until a proper school was rebuilt. In the meantime, it was up to the community to continue the education of their children.⁴⁰

This was not the only fire that was ignited in a Colored school in Wayne County, this was also not the only time that the Carver High School would be burnt down. In the summer of 1940, construction for the rebuilding of the Carver High School was initiated by the town. Forty-one construction laborers were assigned in the assistance of building the new facility. The new structure was costing the school roughly \$116,000 which was partially being funded by the Public Works Administration.^{41,42} On March 5, 1940, the MOT reported that another Colored school was ablaze. Price School house was burnt down on a Thursday morning. Superintendent J.W. Wilson was holding a meeting Wednesday evening, at the school. He was on record saying that when he and others left at midnight the school was still intact, however, a little after

⁴⁰ "Carver High School Burns Completely Friday Morning." *Mount Olive Tribune*. December 19, 1939. North Carolina State Archives.

⁴¹ "Begin Work on Colored School." *Mount Olive Tribune*. June 25, 1940. North Carolina State Archives.

⁴² "Work Going Ahead on Colored School." *Mount Olive Tribune*. July 2, 1940. North Carolina State Archives.

midnight the school was reported to be in flames by locals. By the time fire department services arrived at the school, that damage was too severe to recover any remains of the school.

On March 8, three days after the new reporting, the two alleged assailants were captured by the police. The damage was esteemed at \$3,000 and the costs were entirely covered by insurance. It is interesting to note that the Colored schools in Mount Olive were unique in that they received insurance and funding from the government. Dr. Jennifer Burns, an Africana Studies Professor, at the University at Albany stated the majority of colored schools in the South were rarely ever insured by the state and had to seek insurance through a private alternative which proved too costly, for schools in impoverished areas (the majority being so).⁴³ These school fires were ruled as arson but nearly all cases were unsolved. The schools that were targeted in Wayne and Duplin County were Colored schools throughout Wayne County, White schools were never targets of arson. Through the violence of African American schools being burned down, it was evident that the African American community in Mount Olive had become victims of racism.

Despite this setback, Blacks in Wayne County were still successful in ensuring that their kids obtained an education. The African American population emphasized the importance of education for their children, and never gave up. Their value of education came from the idea that if their children were educated, they would have a better outlook on life than the previous generation. Black activists during this time shared these same views, people such as W.E.B. Du Bois were very outspoken on causes such as education during the first half of the 20th century.⁴⁴

⁴³ Burns, Jennifer. Conversation with Lamb, D. (Feb 2023).

⁴⁴ Du Bois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 29.

Maude Kornegay was an African American philanthropist that lived in Mount Olive, housing four other women according to the 1940 census.⁴⁵ Three of the women were lodgers, Edna Jordan, Mary Harvey, and Dorothy Dula, this was common in the Mount Olive community. According to the census, the other woman, Katie Farsin, was a 21-year-old maid. Maude Kornegay had a column in the MOT called “News of the Negro Population”; here she informs the Black community of events, often held at Carver. In 1940, Kornegay was at the age of fifty-seven meaning that she was writing articles for the newspapers in her late sixties and early seventies.

Like Rivera, Kornegay’s home was considered a historical location in Mount Olive by the late 1990s.⁴⁶ The registration form gave a brighter glimpse into the life of Kornegay and how an old woman was at the center of the African American community. Her home was described as a large two-story brick house with a wraparound porch. Pezzoni continues on the “Mount Olive Historic District” registration form by stating that she was a “leading developer of housing in Mount Olive's African American neighborhoods in the middle decades of the twentieth century. She also boarded teachers at her home.”⁴⁷ Dorothy Dula, a twenty-one-year-old single Black woman, was working at Carver High School while living with Kornogay. She was a college graduate as well according to the school’s biennial reports, and she also taught science.

The locations where the two other women worked are unknown, it was most likely Carver High, but it is not verifiable due to the 1939 and 1941 biennial reports being unavailable. In the middle decades of the 1900s, it was common for teachers to be required to live in the town

⁴⁵ 1940; Census Place: Mount Olive, Wayne, North Carolina; Roll: m-t0627-02986; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 96-2

⁴⁶ Pezzoni, J. Daniel, “Mount Olive Historic District.” US Department of the Interior National Park Service. “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form,” March 25, 1999. <https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/nr/WY0143.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

they taught in, so it was commonplace for teachers to all live together in the same house, this term is known as a teacherage. Living in these housing situations was not mandatory and teachers who lived outside of the teacherages typically lodged with locals in the community. Mrs. Maude was a frequent volunteer, and avid member of the Gospel Light Church, and also was known for housing teachers in her home; Henrietta Williams and Solomon Elliott were also known to house lodge, especially teachers, in Mount Olive.⁴⁸

Economics

The 1940 census proved to be extremely helpful while conducting research for this thesis. What makes the 1940 census better compared to the 1950s or 1930s census, is that there is a section to fill out employment information. This information included the name of the occupation, employer type, weeks worked, and income levels. This is important because it gives a clear sense of where people worked and how much they were making. Through the census record information, quantitative data has been averaged, it is important to mention though that these sample sizes are small. A total of one hundred and sixty-three African Americans were recorded from the census for the collection of data. While ninety-one White residents were recorded from the 1940s census records. It is imperative to also mention that not all 254 residents recorded, provided their occupation information. Hence, the only citizens that were calculated were the ones that had provided the Federal government with occupation information.

In 1939, the Federal Census recorded “Family Wage or Salary Income in 1939” This showed the average income for households in the United States. Each income was separated by

⁴⁸ Kornegay, Carrie. “Carver Alumni and Friends Association, Mount Olive Chapter.” *Facebook* (blog), February 13, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/942909353159585/search/?q=maude>.

race and region. The table below, obtained from the 1939 census, specifically records the income and population percentage for Black households in the South.⁴⁹

Yearly Income	Percentage of Population
0 to \$199	20%
\$200 to \$399	28%
\$400 to \$599	21%
\$600 to \$799	14%
\$800 to \$999	7%
\$1,000 to \$1,399	6%
\$1,400 to \$1,999	2%
\$2,000 to \$2,999	.7%
\$3,000 and over	.22%

Through the data recorded from the 1940 census, the average salary for an African American was \$311 annually.⁵⁰ The average salary for Black households in 1940 was \$497.12. African American households in Mount Olive were in the fiftieth percentile compared to the data from Black Southern Rural Non-Farm Incomes. It is important to note that the occupations from the sample pool were not saturated with specialized workers. Specialized workers lived sporadically throughout the Black community. The sample size also had a large number of women, hence lower-paying jobs were recorded.

In 1940, most African American women were maids working in private homes; this was a typical occupation for Black women in the Jim Crow South. The majority of Black men were

⁴⁹ United States Census Bureau. "Family Wage or Salary Income in 1939." Washington, D.C.: 1940. 87. (accessed Feb 24, 2023).

⁵⁰ Year: 1940; Census Place: Mount Olive, Wayne, North Carolina; Roll: m-t0627-02986; Page: 2B; Enumeration District: 96-2

working as laborers mainly in the log wood industry. The highest paying jobs were known to be teaching, working at the Mount Olive Pickle Company, and clergymen. Teachers in the area could expect an annual salary of upward of \$1,000. 31-year-old Daisy Hinton was a teacher at Carver High that was reportedly making \$800 from 32 weeks of work.⁵¹ A small number of MOPC employees were able to receive a yearly income closer to one thousand, but the majority of them were making only a little over \$600. The clergymen also living in Mount Olive were making a considerable amount of money making upwards of \$800.

Though these numbers may seem considerably smaller today, the Black income in Mount Olive was higher compared to the rest of the state and the South. As previously mentioned, only 14% of Wayne County fell below the poverty line, which was low compared to the rest of Eastern North Carolina.⁵² African Americans living in Mount Olive usually made an above-average salary for Black households, compared to Black households located anywhere else in the South during this time in the United States. The average job for African Americans produced an income of less than \$500 annually. Specialized jobs and jobs at MOPC were on average higher than \$500. It is imperative to state that these numbers could be skewed due to the actual accuracy of the income. This was the only time that the Census records recorded income, and it seems as though not everyone filled out their occupation, despite the box being there. Some would list an income, with no occupation, and others would list an occupation with no income. Compared to the rest of the Black South, Black households in Mount Olive on average had a higher salary compared to the rest of Black households in the South.⁵³

For White households in Mount Olive, they were making in certain cases twice as much as the most paid African American within the town. The average income for White households in

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Flowers. *Thrown Away*. 3.

⁵³ United States Census Bureau. "Family Wage or Salary Income in 1939."

Mount Olive was \$1,006 annually.⁵⁴ This was double the amount of the typical Mount Olive African American residents and Black Southerners. The lowest wages for Whites were the average salary for Black households, there was an obvious pay disparity within the Mount Olive community. Interestingly the average White man that was working at the MOPC made around the same amount as the Black men working there.

Migration

Records left by the only college in Mount Olive – founded in 1951 – help demonstrate the racial animosity and stereotypes that Mount Olive’s African American population endured in the 1950s and 1960s. The Free Will Baptist Church established Mount Olive College in September 1951. The Mount Olive College’s archive contains a collection of yearbooks dating back to 1955. The yearbooks tell a very revealing story of how the White community views their minority neighbors.

Yearbooks show students at the college perpetuated racial stereotypes, May Day was an annual celebration that was conducted by the school. A Queen of May would be presented, and the lucky girl would be crowned by the President of the Student Government Association. In 1963 on Mount Olive College’s historic day, a group of students hosted a show. The show was titled *A Day in the Ole South* which depicted the day of a Southern town. The play was a minstrel show, students at the college masked themselves in Black paint to masquerade as Black people.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Year: 1940; Census Place: Mount Olive, Wayne, North Carolina; Roll: m-t0627-02986; Page: 15A; Enumeration District: 96-2

⁵⁵ *Olive Leaves [1963]. North Carolina Yearbooks.* Mount Olive Junior College (Mount Olive, NC).1963.
https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/29556?ln=en#?xywh=2237%2C1449%2C2913%2C1236&cv=54_

The school's views on Black people can also be reflected in how they represented their Black staff. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, there were only three people who were not of the White race, two being Black staff members Dupree and Christine Ware, and an Asian student. Dupree Ware was a janitor for MOC, it is unknown for how long he remained at the school, but he makes multiple appearances in the school yearbook between 1958 and 1963. Ware was from Greenwood, South Carolina; according to his draft card in 1943, he remained in Greenwood living with his parents at the age of nine-teen.⁵⁶⁵⁷

Christine Wallace was from Mount Olive, more specifically, the tiny area of Scotts store, Scotts store is technically a part of the southeastern city limits of Mount Olive. But any local will tell you that this area is Scotts store. This is because, at the intersection where the area meets, there was (and still is, just not under the same name) a store called Scotts Store, and so that is what it has been called for nearly a hundred years.⁵⁸ During the early and mid-20th century, the Wallace family owned the majority of the land in this area of Mount Olive.⁵⁹ This was learned from an interview with Larry Lamb, whose wife was Elnora Wallace; her father Herbert Wallace was a prominent Wallace in the area before his death. During the great migration, there were groups of Wallaces that migrated into New York City.

It is safe to assume that Christine Wallace was related to the same Wallace family that originated in Mount Olive, North Carolina. The reasons for the Ware family returning to Christine's "ancestral homeland" is still unknown. But for whatever the exact reason is, the evidence shows that it can be presumed that they moved due to Christine's familial relations.

⁵⁶ National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; *Draft Registration Cards for South Carolina, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947*; Record Group: *Records of the Selective Service System, 147*; Box: 198

⁵⁷ Year: 1940; Census Place: *Walnut Grove, Greenwood, South Carolina*; Roll: *m-t0627-03815*; Page: *1A*; Enumeration District: *24-40*

⁵⁸ Mount Olive Locals, Interviewed by Lamb, D. (Jan 2023).

⁵⁹ Lamb, Larry. Interview Conducted by Lamb, D. (Jan 2023).

While the Wares had a rich history in Mount Olive and a family life that extended beyond the town, in the pages of the yearbook, they appear simply as stereotypes and in service occupations. Dupree Ware first appeared in the Olive Leaves yearbook, in 1957, Dupree was smiling wide-eyed glancing away from the picture, above is a caption reading “Dupree Ware, janitor, appears happy on the job.” His wife also makes her debut in the same yearbook Dupree does; the photographer captured Christine brewing a large pot, with a grin to the camera hiding the slightest tooth. The caption below her portrait stated, “‘Soup’s on!’ says Christine Ware, cook.”⁶⁰ For the first three times that Dupree and Christine were presented in the yearbook, it seemed as though Mount Olive College was using their images as a pinup to display their token employees. Every other lunch lady and non-teaching staff member was shown in the yearbooks annually. The Wares were sporadically in the books, only fitting them in if the committee thought that their presence would be acceptable. The majority of the images of Dupree were not in the actual book but instead presented in the advertisement sections at the end of the book. There is another image presented in 1960 showing Ware with a forced grin across his face, holding a wrench, with the caption “Dupree Ware, our janitor, was not this pleased when he found his bicycle hanging from the top of the flagpole” (see Fig.1).⁶¹

African Americans were not respected by the student body of Mount Olive College. The truly confusing question to this story was whether the Mount Olive College staff also shared the same views as the students. This is because Mount Olive College had no obligation to showcase its African American employees. This is evident due to them (the Wares) not being in every

⁶⁰ *Olive Leaves [1963]*. Mount Olive Junior College (Mount Olive, NC).

⁶¹ *Olive Leaves [1960]*. *North Carolina Yearbooks*. Mount Olive Junior College (Mount Olive, NC). 1960.

<https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/29541?ln=en#?#record-files-collapse-header&xywh=1301%2C1430%2C514%2C218>.

yearbook, as if it was an obligation to include them. But at the same time, the staff and yearbook committee showcase blatant racism in the form of insensitive plays and satirizing harassment done by students. It would ultimately only be argued that the staff and yearbook committee may not have been racist or as racist as the students participating in the racist depictions in the photo book. But the picture with Dupree distraught is the oddest of the images taken within the five-year span. This is because there is no clear obvious answer as to why the school decided to take this photo, and secondly to display this photo with the caption it held. It had to have been known before the book's publication that that unwanted comment might spark humiliation and embarrassment by Dupree Ware. The yearbook committee is most likely comprised mainly of students; they reasoned that presenting minstrel shows and public humiliation (see Fig. 2) would be a good way to represent their previous year. This is a clear indication that the majority of the White students attending Mount Olive College in the early 1960s shared racist sentiments common in the Jim Crow South.

Discrimination on college campuses affected African American students and staff alike. As pickle plant spokesperson Lynn Williams explained during an interview conducted in January of 2023, the company enacted a tuition reimbursement available for all employees to aid workers seeking further education.⁶² The problem with this is that the nearest college for African Americans to attend is an all-White institution that only viewed Black people as the help. The closest universities that Mount Olive Black locals were able to attend were located in either Raleigh or Fayetteville. Though the commute might not have been impossible with a vehicle, it is still very unlikely. Annie L. Chestnutt, otherwise known as Aunt Shug in the Mount Olive community, is one of the oldest living residents today, born in 1926. She has stated that during her time growing up and even in adulthood that it was rare for a Black person to own a vehicle;

⁶² Williams, Lynn. Interviewed by Lamb, D. (January 2023)

Black people were often walking or biking, and if accessible, utilizing public transportation.⁶³⁶⁴

Even though Williams stated that this program was offered to everyone it is clear that Black people were not thought of when introducing this incentive. Any of the employees who benefited from this deal were not Black people, they were all White workers.

Nor was discrimination limited to college campuses. Black men and women faced violence in all parts of town. The entrenched stereotypes in the minds of White people led them to act violently towards those African American neighbors they viewed as stereotypes instead of worthy fellow citizens.

Larry Lamb a United States Veteran is from the town of Mount Olive; he explains in an interview the harsh realities of racism and the dynamic between the Blacks and Whites in Mount Olive. He recalls horrifying stories of rape, shame, and humiliation throughout Mount Olive, the White men of the community abused women for decades, Lamb states. It was common for White men to come in the dead of night, like a pack of wolves, invading homes and raping African American women for their perverted pleasures.⁶⁵ On February 24, 1953, the MOT reported the exact scenario Lamb was referring to in his interview. A woman who was married to a tenant farmer swore to police that an older gentleman by the name of W. E. Stanley attempted to rape her. The thirty-five-year-old woman testified that the man forced himself into her home while her husband was away. At first, the strange man offered the woman money, but once she was refusing his advances he resorted to force. The man ultimately denied the charges she was

⁶³ Blakemore, Erin. "How Automobiles Helped Power the Civil Rights Movement." *Smithsonian Magazine*. Accessed February 27, 2023. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-automobiles-helped-power-civil-rights-movement-180974300/>.

⁶⁴ Chestnutt, Annie. Interview Conducted by Lamb, D. (Dec 2022).

⁶⁵ Lamb, Larry. Interview Conducted by Lamb, D. (Jan 2023).

alleging, and Stanley was able to cover the costs for a \$1,000 bail.⁶⁶ The verdict of the trial was never touched upon further in the MOT. The MOT had no problem mentioning the crime that was being done by the Black race, but rarely reported news of White crime unless in some cases it was done to a Black person or a Black person was involved in some way.

The narrative established in Mount Olive portrayed African Americans in a highly negative light. During the c1940s, the newspaper continually portrayed African Americans were seen as a shadow that hovered over Eastern North Carolina. The only time that there were Black people mentioned in the news was when African Americans were perpetrators of heinous crimes. Even in stories that were not about crime, the editors of the newspapers would also produce articles that had degrading undertones against the Black community. They heralded certain Black people for holding meetings to discuss neighborhood action in Mount Olive. Those meeting the editors would twist into being a platform for discourse on how to fix the Black population in order to integrate into White society. The MOT editors were White-washing Black experiences in Mount Olive to make them palatable for a White Baptist audience in the 1940s, that had no interest in the actual well-being or lives of African Americans within their town.⁶⁷

By the 1950s that somewhat changed but in reality, it acted as smoke and mirrors; in the year 1950, the MOT added a column in their paper called “News of the Negro Population”. Maude Kornegay was the writer for the columnist, the material within these columns has little substance with each piece. The most notable feature was that there was never anything political within the writings only positive news for African Americans reading from the MOT. This is how the White community wanted their Black neighbors to be quite non-violent law-abiding

⁶⁶ “White Man Held On Charge By Woman.” *Mount Olive Tribune*, Feb 24, 1953. North Carolina State Archives.

⁶⁷ “Negroes Form Club to Better Race.” *Mount Olive Tribune*, July 21, 1942. North Carolina State Archives.

citizens, to be seen and not heard. This was shown through the treatment of African American workers by the White population in Mount Olive. The Goldsboro Star was the nearest colored newspaper that was circulated throughout Wayne County. The Goldsboro Star would have most likely been the only colored newspaper that African American Mount Olive residents had access to.



Dupree Ware, our janitor, was not this pleased when he found his bicycle hanging from the top of the flagpole.

Figure 2. *Olive Leaves* [1960]⁶⁸

⁶⁸ *Olive Leaves* [1960]. *North Carolina Yearbooks*. Mount Olive Junior College (Mount Olive, NC). 1960. Pg. 119. Fig. 2. <https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/29541?ln=en#?#record-files-collapse-header&xywh=1301%2C1430%2C514%2C218>.



Figure 3. *Olive Leaves* [1963]⁶⁹

Homes for Sale

Mount Olive has been home to hundreds of Black families since their ancestors were still slaves in the United States. If you factor that along with the economic success they achieved in Mount Olive, it was a difficult decision for any residents to just pick up their things and move. But near the close of the 20th century, the United States was rapidly changing along with Mount Olive. The end of the Jim Crow in the South marked the end of opportunistic hindrances that African Americans faced post-Reconstruction in the United States.

By the 1970s, Mount Olive saw a large number of young people leaving the area and moving to locations in the Triangle, such as Raleigh and Durham.⁷⁰ By the end of the 20th

⁶⁹ *Olive Leaves* [1963]. *North Carolina Yearbooks*. Mount Olive Junior College (Mount Olive, NC). 1963. Pg. 55. Fig. 2.
<https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/29556?ln=en#?xywh=2237%2C1449%2C2913%2C1236&cv=54>.

century there was little opportunity left for the next generation. Besides a career in agriculture, there was no viable career path in the town. Anthony Lamb aged forty-eight, and his brother Herbert Lamb aged forty-seven both explain in an interview that most of their classmates moved after graduation including the two brothers. Herbert Lamb explained that his reason for leaving was that he spent some time in Montana and got a taste of life outside of the farm life. After he saw a glimpse into a bigger world he knew he wanted to leave as soon as he could. Herbert graduated and worked at the local turkey plant; saving money until he could afford to move to Raleigh. He stated, while working at the turkey plant he was making six dollars an hour; the Mount Olive Pickle Company was also not paying the same wages it once was several decades prior. Once leaving the town, Mr. Lamb earned nearly 2.5x more money hourly working at the Raleigh-Durham Airport. Anthony Lamb continued in the conversation stating once he left Mount Olive he was making tenfold of that which he was making prior, once moving to the New England area. Anthony and Herbert both stated that there were not too many kids who stayed in Mount Olive after graduation.

When asked, Herbert explained that he never experienced any racism from his peers though, he recalls it was forbidden to be with White women. And told a time when he had to hide in the car while his White girlfriend was driving through the town. He explains that the girl was afraid to be seen alone with a Black boy.⁷¹

Anthony Lamb shares a similar experience as to why he left the town as soon as he could. He shared during our interview that he only has one vivid memory of racism from his childhood. He told me about an experience where he called the home of one of his White friends; when he called, his friend's father picked up the phone. When the father called for his son Lamb recalls their father yelling "That Black ass Nigger is on the phone for you!" Lamb said that he felt

embarrassed by that experience.⁷² From the discussion between the brothers it seemed that as time progressed closer to the 21st century the younger generations of Mount Olive became less racist and a bit more accepting, this presumably was a result of desegregation.

African Americans and other communities left Mount Olive due to the lack of economic opportunities that progressed throughout the century. Today Latinx communities have replaced the workers gap that African Americans left once many of them started to leave the area. In more recent times, they are facing many of the same issues that caused African Americans to leave the community in the late 1900s.

The agriculture industry in North Carolina has seen a rapid decline for over three decades, Mount Olive has seen the effects of this decline overtime. North Carolina is the state with the fifth most farmworkers in the United States. North Carolina also ““leads the nation in Hispanic ‘guest workers’ or seasonal farmworkers’ In addition, the state is the second-largest producer of pickling cucumbers in the United States.”⁷³ In the beginning of the 21st century complaints from farmers started looming on the working conditions and arrangements between the Mount Olive Pickle Company and the farmers of Mount Olive.

Debates started in March of 1999 on the conditions and benefits that were provided by the Mount Olive Pickle Company. The same year the company declined any negotiations with the Farmers Labor Organization Committee (FLOC).⁷⁴ The rise in unionization came from the lack of compensation they received; many farmers during this time were just barely making minimum wage. Farmers in North Carolina found themselves struggling to afford enough food for their families, having to resort to rationing.⁷⁵ In 2004, the FLOC and the Mount Olive Pickle Company eventually came to a mutual agreement where the union was authorized to oversee the employment of eight-thousand farmers and the company sent these workers to more than

one-thousand farms.⁷⁶ Despite this solution being solved it points to the glaring issues as to why many African Americans left the community; after the 1950s economic stability was unsustainable for African Americans in the town. Mount Olive's negotiations with the union due to unsustainable pay hearken back to the way the company reacted in the 1940s when I.F. Witherington introduced the profit-sharing program.

Conclusion

African Americans have had to struggle for social and economic equality since the first Africans landed in the New World. During the Jim Crow South, all African Americans found themselves with a difficult choice to make. They could either stay in the South and endure the turmoil they faced on a daily basis or attempt to migrate to the North and start a new life. For Black Southerners during the first half of the 20th century, they were truly "in a pickle". On one hand, Mount Olive had more opportunities compared to the rest of East Carolina. And yet, the Black community in Mount Olive was in the same position as any other Black community in the South at that time: subject to discrimination, segregation, and oppressive treatment.

Two parts of Mount Olive's community were especially noteworthy: education and health care. A rich education for Black students in Mount Olive is something that the Blacks in the town had been fighting for since the turn of the 20th century. Because of this Carver High School became one of the first North Carolina schools to be accredited by the state. The state superintendent, Clyde Erwin, instated policies during the 1940s that allowed for communities such as Mount Olive, to improve the education of African Americans within the state. The relative urbanization that Mount Olive provided also made it a favorable location for Dr. Rivera to operate his clinic. It is unclear how impactful this truly was according to analytical data, but before Rivera's clinic, the closest hospital that served Black people was forty miles away. This

nearby support saved countless lives and also made medical treatment cheaper and more convenient; not only for Mount Olive African Americans but for the African Americans in Eastern Carolina as well.

The Mount Olive Pickle company was a key contributor to the economic success provided to African Americans in the town. Since the 1990s new industries and opportunities have sprouted out of Mount Olive, such as the chicken and turkey plant in the area. These companies including the MOPC have been known to underpay and withhold benefits to employees. This is due to the increase in immigrant workers being employed to work in these locations; this has become an ongoing problem since the 1990s.

Thus, despite the benefits that may have made Mount Olive a desirable home, the racism perpetrated by the White community by the 1980s made still living there make less sense. The depression during the 1970s negatively affected the towns in North Carolina. By the 1980s and 90s in Mount Olive, there were fewer jobs and less money to be made. For the generation that was born between 1970-1990, Mount Olive was not enough. African Americans and other residents who left Mount Olive were most likely to move to cities like Charlotte, Raleigh, and Durham. Since the end of the 20th century, these three cities' population has been rapidly expanding, and this continues still in 2023. The adverse effects of racism and a lack of job opportunities are what led African Americans in the latter half of the 1900s the right reasons to leave Mount Olive. The middle decades of the 20th century of Mount Olive showed a glimpse of what could have been for Black success during the 1900s when granted opportunities to achieve.

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