

# The Significance of Mr. Will Durham and His Country Store

By John I. Sanders



## **Welcome to Blackstock**

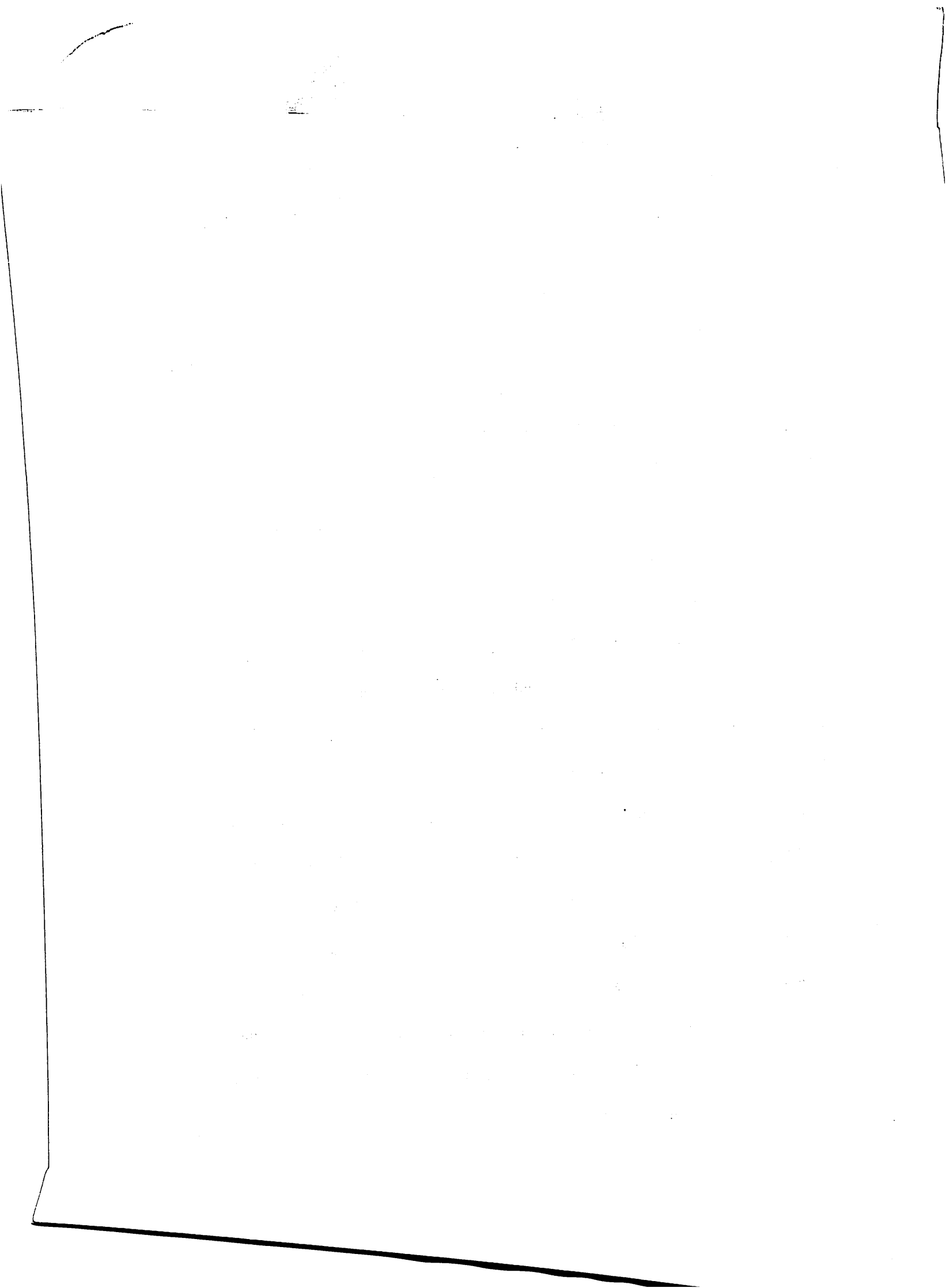
Tucked away in the pines of the South Carolina midlands is the tiny Blackstock community. In 2007 one might place it geographically by saying it is one hour north of Columbia on I-77 and one hour south of Charlotte on the same interstate. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century one would have described it as the little stop on the railroad lines between the mill towns of Chester, Great Falls, and Winnsboro. Regardless of year, some ways of describing Blackstock have not changed. It has always been the red clay, cotton-growing community with a handful of stores lining the railroad tracks. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a business and social center to the community. That center was the grand brick building erected in 1894 when the town was rapidly expanding. The building was made from bricks that were baked in Blackstock, suggesting the building has an unusually close connection to the locale. The inside of the building was spacious and cool in the summer, spacious and warm in the winter, and always open. Inside, inviting wooden chairs were circled for conversation. Outside, two old oak trees had grown into the ends of a wooden plank to make a bench for visitors. The owner of the store was just as inviting as his store. The owner was Mr. Will Durham. As luck would have it, Mr. Will was coming into his prime just as Blackstock was hitting its peak.

When Will took over the store in 1920 he was 30 years old and fresh home from World War I. The charm of Mr. Durham and his locally iconic general store were central pieces of the Blackstock community for decades. Even in 1980's, after the store had closed for business, a 90 year-old Will Durham would open the store so that his neighbors could still gather there. Now, when community members look back at their community in the years between 1920 and 1940 their stories are laced with references to Mr. Will Durham

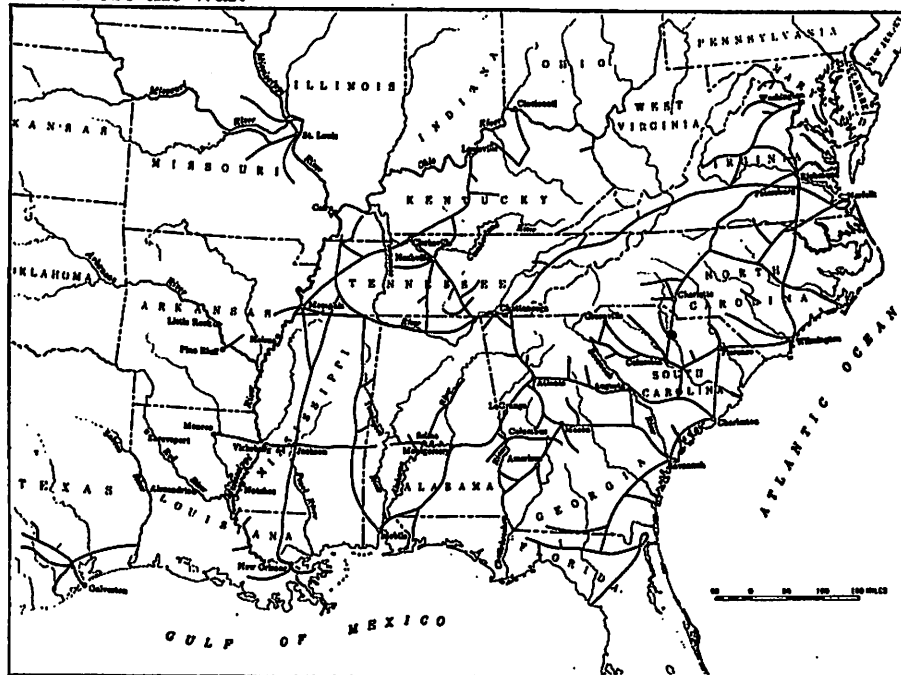
and his country store. The link is strong, and fittingly so. A close look at the economic and social history of Blackstock reveals that Mr. Will Durham was the community's quiet hero for more than 20 years

### **The Rise of Railway Towns: 1865 to 1920**

When the Union Army under General William T. Sherman stormed through South Carolina in February 1865 it devastated the economy of the Palmetto state. Perhaps the greatest damage done by Sherman's army to the South Carolina economy was emancipating the slaves on which the cotton-growing state depended. At the time of emancipation the average South Carolina slaveholder held 66 percent of his wealth in the form of slaves<sup>1</sup>. In the South Carolina midlands, where slave-intensive crops were the means of survival, that percentage was even higher. A planter with many slaves in Fairfield or Chester County might have lost 75 percent of his accumulated wealth. In addition to freeing the slaves on which white planters had invested so much of their wealth, Sherman's army destroyed the railroad transportation capabilities on which South Carolina farmers depended for taking their crops to market. The Charlotte and South Carolina Railway President William Johnstone wrote in the wake of Sherman's march that "A portion of the army followed the line of road to above Blackstock's, over 50 miles, entirely destroyed.<sup>2</sup>" The effect was that Blackstock and the other small communities of Fairfield, Chester, and York Counties lost their ability to ship cotton to textile manufacturers. Whereas they shipped their cotton to manufactures relatively cheaply by rail before the war, afterward they were forced to utilize more cost-intensive transportation. Higher costs, of course, made profit far less likely. Representative William Kelley of Pennsylvania, in making one of his famous post-war tours of the South



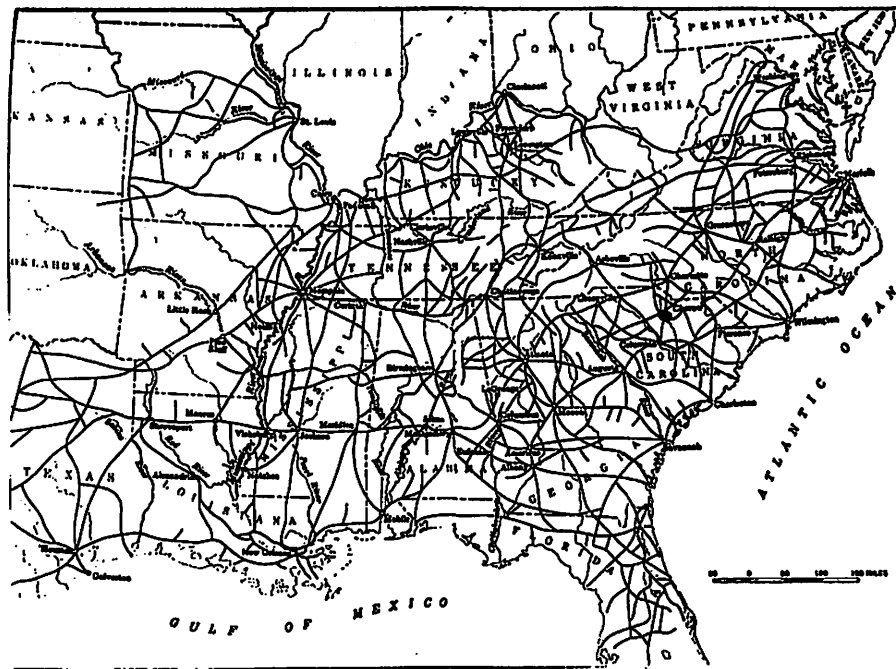
marveled, "In 1867 the South was a land of desolation, her fields were fenceless and uncultivated, and her people were without reproductive stock."<sup>3</sup> Fortunately for the people of South Carolina it did not take long for the economic infrastructure to be rebuilt stronger than before the war.



**River and Rail Routes in the South, 1860<sup>4</sup>**  
**(Blackstock is represented by the red dot)**

Both Northern and Southern capitalists took an immediate interest in rebuilding the railways of South Carolina following the war. Railroad historian Burke Davis observed that after the Civil War "the recovery of [the South's] railroad system in the next thirty years was almost miraculous."<sup>5</sup> In 1880 South Carolina had a mere 1,427 miles of track. By 1920 the state had more than doubled its track length to 3,827 miles<sup>6</sup>. That 40 year period was a time of important railroad expansions, mergers, and consolidations. The line running through the Blackstock community changed hands several times. It had been part of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railway during the

war. Then it fell under the control of the South Carolina Railroad before that company merged with another to form the South Carolina and Georgia Railroad. Finally, with the support of J.P. Morgan and Associates, the Southern Railroad bought the line for \$11 million in 1896<sup>7</sup>. The improvement of existing rail transport and the increase in the number of rail lines made profitable cash crops once again a possibility for the South Carolina farmers who began to build small towns along the railways.



**River and Rail Routes in the South, 1880<sup>8</sup>**  
**(Blackstock is represented by the red dot)**

Around 1880, a noticeable boom in the number of small towns situated along the railroads of the South occurred. South Carolina historian Walter Edgar describes the period between 1880 and 1920 as one when thriving general stores with smaller specialty stores around them operated along the railroads. Among the small stores were often cotton pressing and cottonseed oil operations<sup>9</sup>. The collection of stores and mills near the lines made the production of cotton more efficient and profitable in those small towns. A

Fairfield Herald article from March 8, 1876 described Blackstock, South Carolina as one of the new cotton-producing towns along the railroad. Parallel to the track in Blackstock one could find the depot, post office, and “most of the business houses”<sup>8</sup>. An article found in The News and Herald of Rock Hill from August 1883 tells of a rapidly expanding Blackstock. So many new businesses and houses were being built near the rail line that well-diggers and construction companies could not keep pace. The author of the article observed, “There is something of an epidemic in well-digging raging about Blackstock”<sup>9</sup>. Not only was the economy of Blackstock aided by the railway improvements, it was also helped by the construction of new textile mills in the neighboring towns of Great Falls and Chester. When the News and Herald article was printed in 1883 a new 10,000 spindle textile factory had just been completed in Great Falls<sup>10</sup>. That was just one of the many places Blackstock’s “four thousand bales of cotton are shipped annually” the article stated<sup>11</sup>. 1880 to 1920 was truly a period of rapid expansion along the South Carolina rail lines. The Blackstock community, with its dependence on the expanding railways and cotton crops, serves as a prime example of the new towns built during that era.

It is in the midst of this economic fairytale that this study has its roots. In 1891 the Durham Mercantile and Exchange Company opened for business in Blackstock. In and around the store the people of Blackstock sold their cotton, bought dry goods and groceries, gathered for conversation, and celebrated special occasions for nearly 100 years. The store was a significant place in the life of the community and is a fundamental part of every local’s narrative today. An in-depth study of the Durham general store will reveal economic and social conditions in the Blackstock community

between 1920 and 1940. The study will include an analysis of store ledgers, consideration of articles from local newspapers, and the study of narratives taken from a sample of Blackstock residents who knew the store and its owner as they were between 1920 and 1940. Information gathered from those sources will be compared with secondary sources. The ways in which recently recorded recollections differ from information found in the ledgers and newspapers will be examined so that the reasons for the incongruities can be found. In essence, the purpose of this study is to learn why the members of the Blackstock community remember their own pasts and their community history as they remember them.



**A Map of South Carolina showing Blackstock's neighbors to the north and south, Chester and Winnsboro.**

### **The Blackstock Economy: 1920 to 1940**

The South Carolina cotton economy of 1920 can be described as nothing short of fantastic. At the turn of the century 144 trains a day came through Columbia, South Carolina's capital located 50 miles south of Blackstock on the Southern Railroad



route<sup>12</sup>. In 1920 the traffic was even greater as trade between the North and South increased rapidly. Many of the trains that traveled through Columbia stopped in Blackstock for 15 to 45 minutes<sup>13</sup>. Each train that stopped brought economic profit to the general stores, restaurants, and specialty stores that had attached themselves to the line. South Carolina William Hall would later recall the proximity of Blackstock's businesses to the line. Hall's memoir "A Far Cry" describes childhood trips through the area in which he found each of Blackstock's eight stores and bank were situated as close as possible to the railroad depot<sup>14</sup>. The farming families of Blackstock similarly gravitated toward the railway depot. The reasoning is obvious. Living further from the Durham store and the depot meant more time was needed to market a crop. Time was then as it is now – money. This is the reason A.E. Perkins would write in his 1938 work The South: Its Economic-Geographic Development that "Nearly every farm is within 10 to 20 miles, at the most, of a railroad and few are more than 25 miles from a railroad shipping point<sup>15</sup>." Cotton traded to the Durham store was sold by rail to manufacturers down the line and a majority of the goods offered to Blackstock's citizenry by Durham were shipped in by rail. Trade was good and the railways were the tool by which economic success was made possible.

The economy in the first half of 1921 was racing ahead at break-neck speed. Then the tremendous crash came. In the first 6 months of 1921 the market price of cotton was 41 cents per pound<sup>16</sup>. By December the price per pound had fallen to an amazingly poor 13 ½ cents - a drop of over 66% in market price<sup>17</sup>! The farmers of the Blackstock community were suddenly in dire straights as the cost of production had not decreased along with the prices they received for their produce. The terrible condition of

the cotton economy can be traced back to a series of developments. The first negative development was a change in the international cotton market. Soon after World War I the international markets had evolved tremendously. Gavin Wright wrote in Old South, New South, “But after 1920, the chaotic state of international trade stymied cotton demand, which declined absolutely at .5 percent per year between 1920 and 1930<sup>18</sup>.” The “chaotic state” Wright observed was created by stressed international relations, complex trade agreements, crippling indemnity payments agreed to at Versailles, and Britain’s shifting economic policies. At Versailles the British has insisted on crippling the German economy. By doing this the British wounded one of its best trading partners and kept money out of their own economy. Legendary economist John Maynard Keynes said of the British government, “They invite their own destruction<sup>19</sup>.” With less money the British had less demand for Southern cotton. At the same time, a young politician named Winston Churchill was taking Britain back to the gold standard. This caused a jump in unemployment and deflation that had a negative effect on the international market price of cotton<sup>20</sup>. Not only was the British Empire that had hitherto bought large sums of Southern cotton crippled by exchequer Churchill’s deflationary return to the gold standard and the Treaty of Versailles, but it was also attempting to directly alter international cotton markets. The goal was to make Britain’s textile factories independent of the United State’s cotton production. Sir Herbert Davis was quoted by The Chester News as saying there was an urgent need for the empire to cultivate its own supply of cotton as the United States could no longer be relied upon to meet demand<sup>21</sup>. The aforementioned changes in international markets do not, however, fully account for

the misery of Southern farmers. There were additional causes for lost profit that could be found in the cotton field itself.

The boll weevil pest was responsible for a great deal of the misery suffered by South Carolina cotton farmers after 1920. In fact, many sources blame the economic downturn primarily on the tiny pest that feeds on premature cotton bolls. Their impact on cotton production can easily be found in the statistics. In 1922 South Carolina cotton farmers produced 22% fewer bales than they had in 1920<sup>22</sup>. In 1920 13.2 million bales were produced by South Carolina's cotton farmers. Production fell all the way to 9.8 million bales by 1922. Surprisingly, 3 million extra acres were planted as output slid 3.4 million bales in 2 years<sup>23</sup>. The sharp decline in per acre productivity can only be explained by the emergence of a burden on production – the boll weevil. To meet the burden farmers gave a maximum effort. The local papers from Chester County are littered with advice on how to beat the boll weevil. In an article titled "To Fight Boll Weevil" a Clemson College representative declared, "Not only have we before us at the present time one of the most injurious insect problems, but there [sic] new introduction from foreign countries that require serious attention<sup>24</sup>." He went on to suggest a number of actions for cotton farmers to take, including the use of special Chilean pesticides. The increased efforts of South Carolina's farmers were met only with fewer bales at a lower price per bale. A profit was suddenly impossible for many of Blackstock's farmers.

The economic conditions were disastrous. Walter Edgar wrote of the early 1920's, "No one – neither sharecroppers, tenants, landlords, operatives, nor mill owners – had any ready cash.<sup>25</sup>" A popular tune from the period put the situation succinctly when it asked, "Ten cent cotton and forty cent meat/How in Hell can a poor man eat<sup>26</sup>?" Bills

went unpaid, bad checks were written, and money-related crimes filled the local papers. Savings were decimated by the hard times. South Carolina's private banks lost 1/3 of their deposits between 1920 and 1922<sup>27</sup>. Simultaneously, the farms privately owned or mortgaged at banks had their values halved between 1921 and 1922<sup>28</sup>. Store owners in the state reacted to the situation by adopting "cash-and-carry" policies that required patrons to pay in cash upfront for goods<sup>29</sup>. With no cash and no store credit the cotton farmers of South Carolina around which the economy revolved were lucky to survive. By extension, the store keepers of South Carolina were fortunate to weather the storm and took extreme actions to assure their survival.

Several members of the Blackstock community still living today remember the economic challenges of the 1920's well. William O. McKeown, a 82 year-old white interviewee, told his family's story of living through the recession of the 1920's. Mr. McKeown's family owned and operated a general store and cotton gin just north of Blackstock along the railroad. The McKeowns had entered the 1920's owing several thousand dollars on the general store's mortgage. When the recession hit, Mr. McKeown remembers that patrons bought fewer goods and eventually stopped paying on their accounts. Without income the McKeown family was unable to pay the \$3,000 remaining on the mortgage in 1923<sup>30</sup>. Luckily, a relative of the McKeown family bought the bank-possessed store and allowed Mr. McKeown's family to rent it for many years. Mr. McKeown explains this was fortunate because his father's only other source of income was cotton farming, which certainly was not an attractive or even profitable alternative. Mr. McKeown, with wistful regret, told me in the 1920's and 30's the "community revolved almost entirely around cotton<sup>31</sup>." When cotton failed as it did in the early

COUNTER CHECK



CHESTER, S.C.

9/9

1924

No

**THE NATIONAL EXCHANGE BANK** 67-127

OF CHESTER

PAY TO THE ORDER OF

Durham Merc Co

\$

7.50

Seven 39/100

DOLLARS



J. E. Nichols

This is a check written to Mr. Will Durham for \$7.50 in goods. The check is written by Mr. J.E. Nichols, a regular customer of the Durham Mercantile and Exchange Company. This check is one of many bad checks that were written across the state of South Carolina during the recession of the early 1920's. The above image is a clear view of the check as it was written. The below image is the same check with the "Returned Unpaid" check from the The National Exchange Bank of Chester, South Carolina. The check was returned with the memo "Acct Closed".

**RETURNED UNPAID**

Reason checked, if known

FROM THE NATIONAL EXCHANGE BANK CHESTER, S. C.

Please remit \_\_\_\_\_ cents for presenting and postage.

MEMPHIS, TENN. OFFICE, N.C.

- Check Sent Has Been Paid
- Will Remit As Requested
- Will Write Refused
- Payment Stopped
- Never Pays Drafts
- Not Correct For Signature
- No Attention For Endorsement
- Not Enough Funds
- No Such Account

Acct Closed

9 1924 No

**THE NATIONAL EXCHANGE BANK** 67-127

OF CHESTER

Durham Merc Co

\$

7.50

100

DOLLARS



J. E. Nichols

CO

1920's the whole community was devastated. Ms. Sarah Cassels, a white middle-class neighbor of Mr. McKeown's, has similar recollections of the community's dependence upon the fragile cotton crop. Ms. Cassels recalled, "a hail storm, thunderstorm, and everything would be gone<sup>32</sup>." Middle-class white cotton farmer James Wagers Sr. pointed to the boll weevil as the source of fear and misery in the Blackstock community during the 1920's. He observed, "That year before the boll weevil hit they was making good money around here<sup>33</sup>." Mr. Wagers remembers that especially in the autumn there would be plenty of goods bought with spare cash in the years before 1920. The boll weevil, according to the testimony of Mr. Wagers, changed everything for Blackstock's cotton farmers. Other members of the community agree in their recollections. Once the boll weevil arrived in South Carolina after a long journey up from Mexico the economic viability of cotton farming came into peril.

It is clear that what the interviewees revealed in their narratives can be found in the written accounts of the time period. Found throughout are assertions of the hegemony of cotton farming in the local economy. The narratives also include descriptions of the cotton crop's vulnerability to weather and pests. The difference can be found in what the narratives lack. They do not include the most abstract reason for recession – the international cotton market. There are several reasons for why this might be the case. One reason is that only after many years did the economic academic world fully realize how devastating the international policies of the early 1920's had been. Legendary economist John Maynard Keynes stood almost alone in immediately understanding the effect of the post-war policies of the European allied victors. The first theory then is that the complexity of the international market was never discussed in the

years of the 1921-23 recession and still remains disassociated with the period outside of limited academic circles. Another theory explaining the neglect is that the abstract is easily dismissed from memory. The plagues of the market have been, as the old adage goes, out of sight and out of mind. The boll weevil, the hail, and the thunderstorms were culprits that members of the community could see. Perhaps as they recalled the cotton economy of bygone years they could still envision the tiny cotton-eating pests or the hail beating down on the late summer crops. The international cotton market could never be realized in this way, and has consequently been forgotten. Yet another theory to explain the current collective memory is the constantly repeated story that the boll weevil was the wickedest thing to storm through the South since Sherman. It can be found in novels and movies as a prime reason for farmers' failure. The 1983 TV mini-series "Chiefs" starring Charlton Heston, which was filmed in Chester County, depicted a hardworking cotton farmer driven into the city by the boll weevil infestation<sup>34</sup>. One would be hard pressed to find a similar account that cursed the Treaty of Versailles or the British Exchequer Churchill for the failure of Southern farmers. The truth is most likely a combination of the three theories. In the 1920's there was little scholarly discussion of the greater economic issues playing out on Chester County cotton farms. Therefore, boll weevils and weather became the focus of popular scorn. Accounts in casual conversation and in the media throughout the years have intensified that focus. Now, years of repetition enforced by childhood images have turned the simplified account into hard, indisputable fact.

The South Carolina economy slowly recovered through the 1920's, but the boom years were clearly over. Into the latter part of the decade banks and some businesses

continued to struggle. Their persisting troubles were partially due to global economic conditions and partially due to the lingering mistrust of former patrons. Numerous banks that had operated before the early 1920's recession had met their demise by 1923. Even if a bank carried out a strict policy of collecting on past-due loans the farms they repossessed failed to cover the value of the loans. Bankers who took that course often closed their institutions never to reopen them. This was the fate of the Kennedy-owned Bank of Blackstock. Those that survived struggled to overcome the negative public perception of banks. After 1923 bankers in some communities were replaced after 1923 by general store owners who began to lend cash at interest in addition to offering store credit. The store owners, of course, carried out similar policies as the bankers they had replaced.

Interviewees agreed that it was during this time period that virtually all store owners and bankers began to demand repayment of cash loans and payment on common accounts. Mr. Wagers, a white cotton farm owner who was a friend and client of Will Durham for decades, recalled the loan business offered by Blackstock's store owners. In bad years farmers were sometimes forced to mortgage everything they owned for supplies. Store owners were quick to take their payments by force if another bad year followed. "The owners would take land, houses, chickens, pigs, everything" from failing farmers according to Mr. Wagers<sup>35</sup>. According to the Blackstock narratives it was the owners of the Kennedy store – Durham's rivals – who most aggressively carried out their collection policy. Race played no role in the decision to collect, as Mr. Wagers recalls members of both races being susceptible to collection. The interesting perspective offered by Mr. Wagers' narrative suggests class effected collection policy. That



collection policy, in turn, shaped unfair historical perceptions. Many textual accounts depict poor white and black farmers who were unable to pay on loans and accounts. The poor were harassed and remembered only because store owners had authority over them. They lacked the authority to forcefully collect from wealthy and publicly respected customers because “A lot of it was word of mouth” rather than by written contract<sup>36</sup>. Revealing a candid conversation with Mr. Durham, Mr. Wagers recalled, “He told me that people that’s in position to pay was the ones that beat him<sup>37</sup>.” Some “beat him” for as much as \$500 with impunity from collection and the scorn of history, leaving less-respected people to pay instead.

It must be remembered that not all of the South’s rural general store owners ran hostile or corrupt lending businesses in the 1920’s. One who did not was Will Durham of Blackstock. Each of the interviewees revealed that the hallmark of the Durham Mercantile Company was easy credit and forgiveness. Mr. Durham granted most members of the community accounts with credit up to \$100 or a little more. Many farmers would “strike a lien” with Mr. Durham in the spring to get an account balance until they could pay from their harvest<sup>38</sup>. Proof that a great deal of Mr. Will Durham’s sales took place in the spring to folks who would “strike a lien” comes from the ledgers of the Durham store. Samples taken from 3 years show that each year Spring purchases more than doubled autumn purchases. March, April, and May were used to represent the planting season in the study. September, October, and November were used as the autumn harvest season. In each year examined the spring purchases were between 150% and 300% the dollar amount of autumn purchases<sup>39</sup>. In 1920, the first year of the study, Durham’s customers consumed 160% more in the spring than they did in the autumn.

That was a wide spread compared to others years in the study. In 1935, one finds the greatest difference between seasonal spending. That year, the patrons of the Durham store spent 266% more in the spring than in the autumn. spring purchases were Even in 1940, the last year of this study, spring purchases were 194% of the real dollar value of autumn purchases. These figures demonstrate, as narratives claimed, that the Durham store's business was based on credit lending to local cotton farmers. The study also proves that memories are very accurate in describing the importance of merchant lending

**Table Illustrating Planting Season and Harvest Purchases at the Durham Store.**  
Real dollar amounts are in ( ) next to the nominal dollar amounts.<sup>40</sup>

Time period	Nominal Dollar Amount	Real Dollar Amount (2007)
March 1920		
April 1920:	774.93	(7,962.41)
May 1920:	571.46	(5,871.75)
Planting Season 1920:	2283.67	(23,464.71)
September 1920:	621.81	(6,389.10)
October 1920:	475.40	(4,884.73)
November 1920:	336.70	(3,469.59)
Harvest Season 1920:	1433.91	(14,733.43)
March 1935:	575.78	(8,636.70)
April 1935:	458.01	(6,870.15)
May 1935:	739.46	(11,091.90)
Planting Season 1935:	1773.25	(26,598.75)
September 1935:	229.77	(3,446.55)
October 1935:	179.45	(2,691.75)
November 1935:	257.71	(3,865.65)
Harvest Season 1935:	666.93	(10,003.95)
March 1940:	343.81	(5,046.64)
April 1940:	450.34	(6,610.35)
May 1940:	1336.25	(19,614.24)
Planting Season 1940:	2130.40	(31,271.23)

September 1940:	178.67	(2,622.62)
October 1940:	354.59	(5,204.87)
November 1940:	566.32	(8,312.77)
Harvest Season 1940:	1099.58	(16,140.26)

Those who were not farmers could also get account credit at the Durham store. Mr. Durham's policy is conventional in that aspect. A perfect example of how Will Durham was an extraordinary owner comes from an interview with Ms. Gertrude Davis. Gertrude Davis is a lifelong domestic servant who has lived her entire life in the all-black community not more than 100 yards from the Durham Mercantile Company. She bought "clothes, groceries, everything" from Mr. Durham on credit in 7 different decades starting with the 1920's<sup>41</sup>. When asked what Mr. Durham would do if she was late in paying on her account, Ms. Davis smiled broadly before simply saying, "Wait"<sup>42</sup>. Ms. Davis went on to say it is for his easy credit policy and his kind heart that Mr. Will Durham is fondly remembered to this day. Aiding this memory of Mr. Durham are memories of the Kennedy store owners. The Kennedys never let a person forget they were indebted to the store. The pride and aggression of the Kennedys is still remembered well by Blackstock's elder citizens whose eyes still flicker with hate when recalling Mr. Kennedy and wife who was "something of a bitch"<sup>43</sup>. Mr. Durham was undoubtedly kind in his own right, but the contrasting memory of miserly rivals like the Kennedy Store operators made him "the love of the country" from the moment he took over the store upon returning from World War I<sup>44</sup>.

Gertrude  
Davis



The Durham store, found just right of center in this 2007 photograph, is found on Blackstock's busiest street directly across from the railroad line. To the right of the red brick Durham store are some other stores still standing from the years 1920-1940.

When the stock market crashed in 1929 hard times again hit the Southern economy like a sledge hammer. Per capita income in South Carolina, which had risen to \$261 by 1929, slid all the way to \$151 by 1933<sup>45</sup>. The black farming counties of Fairfield and Chester again suffered worse than others. Fairfield County had an unemployment rate of above 30% after the crash<sup>46</sup>. As before, all parts of the Southern economy were devastated by the economic depression. For Southern farmers it only augmented the effects of a stagnant international cotton market. The store owners whose livelihoods were directly linked to rail traffic and the success of cotton farmers were devastated in two ways once rail traffic from the North slowed to a trickle. Burke Davis wrote in his history of the Southern Railroad that, "The first years of the depression nearly halved the freight load of the Southern Railroad from 8.4 billion ton-miles in 1929 to 4.4 billion in 1932<sup>47</sup>." Likewise, passenger miles fell by 50% during the same time period<sup>48</sup>. William Durham of Blackstock and his rivals would have been hard-hit by the depression as they no longer had profitable cotton to trade, customers with cash to buy goods, or trains full of northerners stopping long enough to make a purchase or two.

Interviewees from the Blackstock community offered many stories highlighting the importance of the railway to the local economy. Sarah Cassels recalls that “everything came by rail” just as everything left by rail<sup>49</sup>. She also remembered that the trains would stop for 15 to 45 minutes at the Blackcock depot. In that 45 minutes passengers would step off the train and others would board. Simultaneously, finished goods for the Durham and Kennedy stores would be unloaded while raw cotton from the same stores would be loaded onboard the train. Mr. McKeown claimed that his family’s store and others general stores located along the railways felt they were as dependent on travelers as they were on locals. Ms. Eloise McKeown remembers that the trains stopped by so often that those living near the lines would know the engineers’ names. The account of every white interviewee explicitly addresses the dependence of the community on the railroads for transportation of people, goods, and materials. One, Sarah Cassels, even went as far as to say that trucks and buses were very rarely seen given the supremacy of the train. This sharply contrasts with the testimony of black interviewees who spoke at length about the importance of Greyhound buses and trucks to their lives. Both Gertrude Davis and Bernice Ferguson expressed their reliance on Greyhound and U.S. Highway 21 which ran parallel to the tracks through Blackstock. The difference in memory is most likely due to socioeconomic differences. White members of the community could afford to travel by train and saw their farm produce shipped by rail in the autumn. Black members of the community, by contrast, could not afford to travel by rail and rarely could see a direct connection between their livelihoods and rail traffic. Despite the difference in testimony between the races it is indisputable that the rails were essential to the entire community’s welfare. The slowing of rail traffic during the

depression, therefore, hit the community hard.

There were also other factors that played into the welfare of general stores of South Carolina during the depression-era. Richard Stoffle from the University of Wisconsin – Parkside claimed in his paper “Whither the Country Store?” that smaller communities were hurt in the 1930’s by a rapid centralization that took business back to the county seats and other large cities. This process of centralization was little more than the flight of unsuccessful farmers to the county seats, mill towns, and larger cities of the south in search of a better way of life. Between 1920 and 1930 twenty-four of forty-six South Carolina counties lost population due to tough economic conditions<sup>50</sup>. The poorest white farmers and blacks were often the first wave of the rural exodus. Those who did own their own farms often owned very small, struggling farms. Those who did not were sharecroppers or rented land from owners of large estates. With every blow to Southern cotton farming another wave of blacks and poor whites deserted Chester and Fairfield counties. For the Durham store of Blackstock the process of centralization took customers away as Blackstock’s failing cotton farmers sought jobs in the textile mills of nearby Great Falls, Chester, and Winnsboro. That was, of course, if they did not defect to Baltimore, Philadelphia, or another northern city. Stoffle concedes that the Durham store may not have been as seriously threatened by the process as smaller specialty stores might have been. He writes, “The county seat is where the action is. There are, however, two traditional institutions which have partially resisted this centralization process: these are the country store and the country church<sup>51</sup>.” The general stores of the rural South survived by offering three key services to their communities. They were, 1) acquiring and redistributing general foodstuffs and basic material items; 2) providing credit; and

3) providing a place for social gatherings<sup>52</sup>. The function that saved the country stores during the most critical times was the offering of credit with more understanding toward delinquent accounts than retailers in the county seat. Credit allowed the goods to be made and crops to be raised despite the financial difficulties of the Great Depression just as it had in the 1920's.

There were other economic factors that countered the centralization effect that Stoffle outlined. One was an increase in the fear of larger or chain stores which first arose during the recession of the early 1920's. Early efforts to fight chain stores had been disorganized and ineffectual. Attacks were more successful and organized by the time the Great Depression hit. The radio was increasingly utilized, print ads were posted in local newspapers, and legislation was written to subvert chain store hegemony. William "Old Man" Henderson, a supporter of Louisiana Governor Huey P. Long, was one great chain store opponent who called on the public to rally behind smaller operations:

We have appealed to the fathers and mothers – who entertain the fond hope of their children becoming prosperous business leaders – to awaken to a realization of the dangers of the chain stores' closing this door of opportunity<sup>53</sup>.

The state of South Carolina was not unlike her Southern neighbors who took action to curb the expansion of chain stores. South Carolina passed a law in February 1932 requiring all retail stores to pay a special tax ranging "from \$5 to \$150 each year depending upon the number of stores owned by a single firm or corporation<sup>54</sup>." The legislation gave Durham and his colleagues along the railways of South Carolina a helping hand in fighting off competition from the county seat.

In the years of the New Deal, America began to slowly climb from the depths of the Great Depression. South Carolina, however, lagged behind in recovering because

many of the reasons for the Southern economic crisis persisted. Cotton, still the center of the Southern economy, had not been a profitable business for over a decade. Through the worst of times the farmers of Chester County kept their heads up and fought tooth-and-nail for survival. The local newspapers of the 1930's are filled with articles advising farmers how to carry out the fight. Some efforts were belligerent and unreasonable. One article reflecting this was found in the November 14, 1932 issue of The Chester Reporter. It was a front page feature article titled "Farmer's Congress". The article states, "No belief is more widespread in many of the sections of the country than the belief that Washington is determined by Wall Street and that Wall Street is determined not to give the farmers a chance<sup>55</sup>." Only after several years of defiant if not ignorant struggle did the debate over cotton farming begin to open up. Replacing simplistic tales of boll weevil infestations and wicked Wall Street conspiracies were academic studies. An article from The Chester News of November 2, 1937 reports on a lecture given by Dr. O.M. Clark of Clemson College concerning the economics of cotton. Essentially, the Dr. Clark had talked extensively about the complexity of the international cotton market and Southern cotton's loss of supremacy in that market. No longer did the South determine worldwide production. This was the reason that Southern farmers did not see a clear link between their production and prices as they had before. The complexity of the issue was admittedly trying for the audience. The Chester News reporter remarked, "The extent to which [Dr. Clark] succeeded was measured by the mental habits of his hearers, for he was remarkably lucid throughout in what he said – but he said so much, that the average man was lost in the forest at the end, perhaps<sup>56</sup>." The complexity of the issue, and the sheer number of forces acting on the economy help explain why more academic studies



failed to change the way Southern farmers remember the difficult decades of the 1920's and 30's.

Narratives from the Blackstock community collected in the spring of 2007 reveal much about the way memory of the depression era economy has changed over the past 70 years. In the 1930's Blackstock farmers were angry at powerful institutions in the North including "Washington" and "Wall Street"<sup>57</sup>. In the collected narratives from 3 generations later we find a softening of those feelings. Instead of searching for a villain to blame for the hard times of the 1930's the interviewees took comfort in a shared community suffering. Often they would follow a statement about the difficulty of the times with an expression of shared experience. Mr. William McKeown claimed in his interview, "Everyone was in the same boat so we didn't worry about it much"<sup>58</sup>. Ms. Eloise McKeown, commenting on the shared misery, spoke of rationing, "You couldn't just go and buy what you wanted then"<sup>59</sup>. Ms. McKeown, a 97 year old member of the community, continued, "I think everyone that farmed was about in the same category"<sup>60</sup>. Although the testimonies are similar they differ in an important way. Ms. McKeown acknowledged explicitly what many had forgotten about the depression years – economic disparity. The members of the Blackstock community were not all in the same economic boat. In fact, there were groups in extremely different financial situations. There were simple farmers who were struggling for survival and their black sharecropper counterparts who made up the bulk of the community. There were also black domestic servants like Gertrude Davis who depended upon the success of wealthy merchants like William Durham for their livings. The merchants of Blackstock were so much wealthier than others in the community that Sarah Cassels compared them to modern millionaires.

So why then do so many now remember economic parity? This disparity between memory and fact must be explained.

A plausible theory explaining the difference between memories and known circumstances is that the community rallied together against a series of bodies they could easily contrast with themselves. The bodies have become less specific over the years, changing from Wall Street to wealthy yankees to a simple group of others they can remember came through on some of the nation's finest trains while the people of Blackstock were at the depths of their personal misery. Gavin Wright showed in his Old South, New South that the Depression era was a time in which the wealth gap between Southerners and the northerners who rode "the most luxurious train in the world" through Blackstock spread rapidly<sup>61</sup>. In fact, the gap was wider during the 1930's than it had been at any time since the Civil War. Melissa Walker, who did some of the earliest work dealing with the memories of Southern farmers in her book Southern Farmers and Their Stories, explained why members of a community will often exhibit the same themes in their memories in an effort to form a group identity. In the narratives of Southern farmers she found that, "One of the most surprising elements in the stories told by many of the farm folk in this study was the theme of relative equality<sup>62</sup>." She then speculated that community members recall relative wealth equality as a way of easing painful individual memories of living in abject poverty when others had plenty. The disparity between members of their community and their urban or Northern neighbors was painfully clear to the people of Blackstock and jealousy naturally arose. They then united to accuse others for their suffering. In time, both the jealousy and misery have vanished. Only now can a more honest, introspective look at the times be taken.

## **Blackstock Society**

The study of Blackstock and the Durham Mercantile and Exchange Company has up to this point been restricted to the economic life of the community. Now the focus will shift to the community's social interactions. In particular, class and race relations in the community between 1920 and 1940 will be examined. One would expect them to be poor in a state where an unofficial aristocracy ruled long after the Confederacy was defeated. One would expect them to be at their worst in what are often termed the Jim Crow era and the Depression era. This was the time of the Ku Klux Klan, de jure segregation, vigilante lynching, and gross wealth gaps. It would be unfair, however, to simply jump to conclusions about the Blackstock community's social interactions. For the academic and objective study of the topic the same sources utilized in studying the economy will once again be relied upon. Local newspapers, narratives, and secondary sources will be compared to reach an understanding of Blackstock's social interactions and the memories formed of those interactions.

South Carolina of the 1920's and 30's was a state well-known for its social divisions. Every year a wealth of new studies are conducted by Southern historians that outline poor and often violent interactions between the sexes, classes, and races. The divisions between races were to be found in all aspects of life including education, public facilities, and living spaces. There was also a clear division of labor between whites and blacks. Gavin Wright explored this concept in Old South, New South before positing the theory that little had changed since 1865. By this he meant blacks still worked the land of white farmers for an unfair wage. Wright wrote that, "a market for labor neither existed nor functioned" in the antebellum South<sup>63</sup>. He also argued that blacks did not

have a better option for the in industrial work, for the wages of cotton farming and textile manufacturing were closely linked. Others disagree with Wright's assertions in claiming that white farmers were not the masters of blacks or even their own masters as they had been before the war. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century C. Vann Woodward argued that the merchants and industrialists had supplanted the planter class after the war. Proponents of that New South vision argued it was now that group of elite whites that held the true power in South Carolina – not those still owned the cotton fields. The argument over who held social supremacy within the community is especially difficult to resolve when it is examined within the context of the Blackstock community. In Blackstock there did not exist an industrialist class, but there did exist a very small group of elite white merchants. Among those merchants were the Douglasses, the Durhams, and the Kennedys. These were the families Sarah Cassels compared to millionaires. Did the white merchants, because they were Blackstock's wealthiest, hold the highest perch on the social ladder? Perhaps the question can best be answered by examining the business transactions between various groups. As stated previously, virtually the entire community was indebted to Will Durham and the other general store owners for some reason or another. William McKeown agreed on this point in his interview when he said, "I suspect that most everyone owed them money<sup>64</sup>." This included wealthy white merchants who needed Durham's goods, white farmers who owned their own land, poor white tenant farmers, black farm owners, black sharecroppers, and black domestic servants. The immediate question to answer is where to fit characters like Will Durham on the social ladder. Should they be at the top as Woodward suggested or just below wealthy white farmers as Wright believed? For the answer a look back at debt collection is helpful. It

was the merchant class and well-respected white farmers who had so much esteem in the community that store owners were not free to collect on their debts. Yet, we know that many white farmers who owned their own lands were subject to collection. Therefore, a division in the white farmer class must have existed. That division should be made between old respected families and new wealth farmers, according to the narrative of James Wagers. When asked which families used their status against lenders, Mr. Wagers refused to disclose family names. Even when explicitly asked, Mr. Wagers said, "I won't say names<sup>65</sup>." He did, however, make it clear that the old and respected families of that period are the families of equal stature today. With a successful merchant class wedged firmly between two white farm-owning classes the Blackstock community stands as a contradiction to C. Vann Woodward's New South labor theory. It also stands as a slight contradiction to Gavin Wright's New South as it deviates from the planter class-controlled society with its wealthy and influential merchant class.

Blackstock's upper social classes have therefore been determined in order of power: old planter families' descendents, merchant class, and wealthy white farmer owners. Just below the wealthy white farm owners is what one could call the middle class. This class is that of the white small farm owner. This class enjoyed the privileges of whiteness that black farm owners did not while also enjoying the freedom of owning their own operation. These are the farmers whose stories have been touched upon so often in this study. This group made up the majority of white farmers who owned nearly 66% of the state's farm acres in 1922<sup>66</sup>. They were not the successful farmers or the respected farmers. This was the class that struggled to survive both the recession of the 1920's and The Great Depression of the 1930's. Many did succumb to economic

conditions and took refuge in the larger mill towns through the process Stoffle called Centralization. Those who survive the harder times did so by accumulating tremendous debt. Walter Edgar found in his construction of South Carolina history that in 1930 one third of South Carolina's farms were mortgaged and 70 percent of farmers survived on borrowed funds<sup>67</sup>. The poverty of this group can not be overestimated. The poverty of the rural south was so trying that Michael Harrington called it the "harshest and most bitter poverty" in existence<sup>68</sup>. The white farm owner class in the South was much poorer than similar groups in the United States. In 1939, the last year considered in this study, 30% of all land broken in the U.S. was done by tractor while a mere 10% of land broken in the South was done by tractor<sup>69</sup>. In comparison to other individual regions the South's farmers look even more miserable. The example again comes from a 1939 study showing that 81% of Mountain-Pacific farmers were breaking their land by tractor as compared to 10% in the South<sup>70</sup>. The South's white land-owning farmers were still living in nineteenth century conditions as the twentieth century was reaching its midpoint.

Still, this class of white farm owners held a distinct advantage over African-Americans who owned their own farmers. The advantage consisted of more lenient lending policies, greater access to education, and the economic head start that came with white skin color. The advantages that white farm owners had over white tenant farmers and all of the community's blacks are countless. In the newspapers of the 1930's we find a number of societies formed by white farmers to protect their interests. One such society was the Farmer's Congress that camped out near the Capital building in Washington, D.C. to gain attention in 1932<sup>71</sup>. Another society was the progressive Grange movement active in Chester and Fairfield counties during the 1920's and 30's. An article from The

counties can be divided into a small farm owner category slightly above a large black sharecropper class.

Below the very small percentage of the population that can be described as independent black farmers is the class of black sharecroppers, cotton-pickers, and domestic servants. The Blackstock community was one in which this lowest class was essential. The narratives of Gertrude Davis and Bernice Ferguson reveal that Blackstock's lowest class was broke but busy. With hundreds of "cotton pickers and domestics" living near the tracks and businesses of Blackstock, the lowest class played a vital role in white cotton production, the running of white households, and the every day business of Blackstock's merchants<sup>75</sup>. The class of black cotton pickers and domestics was so intertwined with the community's society that many interviewees tended to view them in the "same boat" narrative. The difference of course, is that all other classes had the freedom and responsibility of forming their own plans for making a living. The other classes choose when they would go to work and what work they would do. The lowest class of blacks was absolutely dependent upon having assignments to work alongside white merchants and farmers. When the season was right and times were good the lowest class had employment. When times were lean they hoped they would find employment by hanging around Blackstock's social center – the Durham Store. There they might be found for a day of cotton picking or a longer stint as a domestic in a white household. If no employment could be found for a long period of time, or if an employer was not fair in his wages, blacks of this category depended on Mr. Durham's leniency to maintain their Blackstock homes. If it were not for Mr. Durham the community might have lost its labor force.

Chester Reporter dated November 10, 1932 makes the importance of the movement clear as it describes the ascension of local men to leadership positions within the Grange movement. The white farmers who struggled found some solace in these groups. They also received greater government assistance and the assistance offered by fellow members. White tenant farmers and black farmers could not build levers of power on this scale.

Now, an exploration into the world where race and socio-economic status seem to collide most violently is necessary. Gavin Wright wrote that for many decades after the Civil War many whites and a very large percentage of blacks were dependent upon white landlords. In 1930, 800,000 African-Americans were operating farms in South Carolina, but only 186,000 were farming on land they owned<sup>72</sup>. That means that over 75% of all African-American farmers were tenant farmers who owed a percentage of their produce to white landlords. Those are, of course, statistics describing the state of South Carolina. The counties of Chester and Fairfield, which claim equal portions of Blackstock, both had majority black populations during the 1920's and 1930's. This makes it likely that a large portion of the overall labor force in the Blackstock area was that of the black sharecroppers. Sadly, little is known about this large portion of the population. A local newspaper illuminates an otherwise murky image of black farm life in a piece titled "Negro Farmer Tells Why He Is Independent"<sup>73</sup>. In that article African-American farmer Dave Nesmith beams with pride at his ability to "survive" without a landlord<sup>74</sup>. From this very small portion of evidence it seems that few local blacks farmed independently. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the thousands of blacks in rural Chester and Fairfield



With the use of newspaper articles, secondary resources, and a few oral histories a social hierarchy for Blackstock has been constructed. That constructed hierarchy should now be compared to the narratives offered recently by Blackstock's citizens to see if a similar hierarchy is remembered. The findings are complex. Time and again interviewees describe a society in which economic equality was the rule. Statements similar to "Everyone was in the same boat" are common<sup>76</sup>. However, they are often pointedly ironic when considered with statements made just moments before or after. Speaking of the economy Ms. Eloise McKeown said, "I think everyone that farmed was about in the same category<sup>77</sup>." Just moments later, when asked specifically about the welfare of the African-American community, Eloise said, "They farmed for the white people<sup>78</sup>." In a limited interview with Elizabeth Wagers, she revealed that her father had been one of the many cotton farmers who dealt cotton to Mr. Will Durham. Mrs. Wagers' father had several African-American hired hands. In explaining why her father hired African-Americans Mrs. Wagers said, "That's about the only help anyone could get<sup>79</sup>." What is obvious from the aforementioned narratives is that a class and racial hierarchy existed which Blackstock's elder citizens still indirectly recall. The best summation of the hierarchy comes from Sarah Cassels. Ms. Cassels described her family as middle class cotton farmers with 115 acres. In her interview Ms. Cassels spoke of very wealthy farm families and merchants whose economic success greatly overshadowed her own family's. She also recognized that "Most in the area were very poor" farmers struggling to make a living from the land<sup>80</sup>. Ms. Cassels went a step further in recognizing that "very little mixing between the races" existed, but spoke of divisions within the black community as well<sup>81</sup>. There were the sharecroppers and

domestic servants that white families retained. Those blacks “were treated fairly<sup>82</sup>.” Another group of blacks existed just below the first according to Ms. Cassels. Those were the African-Americans of Blackstock who had no steady employment. She described the situation plainly, “Blacks sat on the bench out in front of the Durham Store<sup>83</sup>.” Ms. Cassel’s ability to recognize the levels in her small society at such a young age and recall them now in vivid detail is remarkable. The same can be said for her objectivity in understanding race relations. Unfortunately, few others in the community recall the complexity of Blackstock’s society as it was in the 1920’s and 30’s. They instead recall the most black and white of notions. They recall all whites, who were poor farmers, and a group of black people who were well-treated.

The final aspect of the Blackstock community to consider is that of social interactions between the races in public spaces. As stated before, the period dealt with in this study is considered one of the harshest in Southern history for its strict racial segregation and brutal suppression of the black people. In the newspapers of Chester County one finds proof of that harsh world. An article from the October 17, 1932 issue of The Chester Reporter announced the beginning of “The Colored Fair”. The article gives a glowing account:

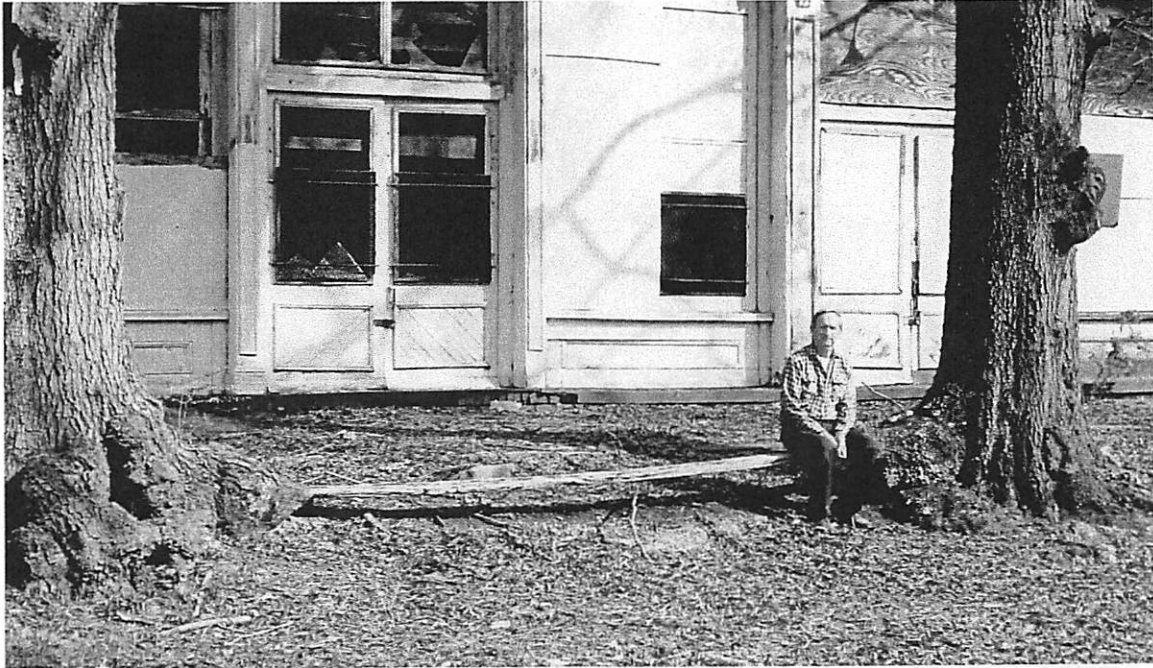
A splendid midway will furnish the amusement. The exhibition has been growing in size and interest during the years, and this year’s fair promises to be the best in the history of the association<sup>84</sup>.

The account is finely written, but the mere existence of a colored-only fair tells the story of the time. There, of course, is much worse evidence of social division. For example, one could find countless sensationalized tales of black depravity in archived editions of The Chester News. Both the February 20<sup>th</sup> and February 23<sup>rd</sup> editions of the newspaper

from 1923 offer alarming front page stories about “negroes” admitting to the murder or sexual assault of innocent whites. It is peculiar that similarly dated editions of The Chester Reporter do not mention the heinous crimes carried about by unnamed blacks against whites. Evidence suggests it is no coincidence. If one studies archives of Chester’s two newspapers it becomes clear that The Chester News all-to-often became the mouthpiece of fear mongering white supremacists. The paper seals the reputation for itself with articles like “White Robed Men Left Fiery Cross”<sup>85</sup>. That article tells the supposedly comical story of a “Negro” who when he saw the approaching Klansmen cried out, “who dat? Heap uh ‘um! Feet take me away<sup>86</sup>!” What we learn from these news articles is that there were two camps in the county in terms of racial views. There were the passive supporters of de jure segregation who patronized The Chester Reporter. Then there were the supporters of suppression by force of the black population who supported The Chester News.

In the narratives taken from members of the Blackstock community an interesting memory of racial segregation can be found. Many white interviewees spoke of beloved black assistants who were naturally inferior in socio-economic stature. These people were well provided for by their white employers. Their narratives reveal the paternalistic ideal of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ms. Eloise McKeown spoke of giving the hired hands Christmas gifts, second-hand clothes, and other gifts. Sarah Cassels likewise claimed, “Blacks were treated fairly<sup>87</sup>.” Mr. William McKeown went a step further in describing the good treatment of Blackstock’s African-American community by saying, “Race never made much difference here in Blackstock”. “Didn’t see any clans or anything – didn’t know nothing about them<sup>88</sup>.” One might think this white collective memory as nothing

but a conveniently constructed memory if it were not for supportive testimony by black interviewees.



Mr. Henry Sanders sits on the iconic bench just outside of the Durham store's front door. This is the bench where members of the Blackstock community socialized and sought employment for decades. As can be seen from the photograph, the long bench and the open area in front of the store made ideal spaces for socialization in the heart of the community.

Black interviewees painted an amazing and vivid picture of life in a small Southern community where race relations were good in the Jim Crow era. To begin her comments on race relations Ms. Gertrude Davis said, “We were so neighborly years ago<sup>89</sup>.” Ms. Bernice Ferguson then chimed in to clarify the statement of her friend, “They – both whites and blacks – would associate with you<sup>90</sup>.” Ms. Ferguson was making a necessary clarification given that many might assume Ms. Davis’ “We” was a reference to the black community. Ms. Ferguson was making it clear that Blackstock was a single body of citizens rather than two as my question had implied. The two ladies went on to describe years in their community of generosity between the races. “People was always bringing you something”, Ms. Davis said as Ms. Ferguson nodded in

agreement<sup>91</sup>. As for socializing, Blackstock's black population was given a free hand. Black vendors greeted the arriving trains and the Saturday shopping crowds. They had parades and jazz concerts too! All this mixing took place at the heart of the community, in front of the Durham store. "Everyone would meet there!", Ms. Davis exclaimed at one point<sup>92</sup>. There and at the Mt. Tabor Presbyterian Church. It depended on the occasion, she explained. When pressed for some memory of racial strife Ms. Davis pursed her lips and thought for a moment. In the end she said, "I've never had any trouble out of anybody<sup>93</sup>." Even when pressed for any memory of racial violence in the community, both Ms. Davis and Ms. Ferguson remained silent. Their only words that referenced a segregated Blackstock were descriptions of the segregated schools and of their beloved Russell School. The conclusion, therefore, is that of the two types of people in Chester County – The Reporter readers and The News readers – Blackstock was of the former class. It was a place where segregation of schools and the social classes were merely the order of the day. Segregation was not a violently insisted upon state of affairs nor was it an institution to be vilified in Blackstock. It simply was, and the man who soothed the community's soul was the man at the center of the community both literally and figuratively – Mr. Will Durham.

### **Conclusion**

The study of history has long since disregarded the so-called "Great Man" theories. These theories, in which one man is given credit for a grand achievement, seem too simplistic an explanation. In this case, perhaps there should be a challenge to the direction of the discipline. Throughout the course of this study it has been demonstrated time and again that Will Durham was Blackstock's quiet hero between 1920 and 1940.

When Blackstock was being carved from the pines Will Durham's father and uncle started the Durham Mercantile and Exchange. Will, a young World War I veteran, took the helm when Blackstock was in its prime. He soon turned his store into Blackstock's finest cotton exchange and general retailer. In times of economic depression he lent a helping hand by lending and forgiving in a way few business men would dare.

Remembering Will's actions during the Great Depression Ms. Eloise McKeown said, "I think he helped a lot of people out<sup>94</sup>." No interviewee of any race, gender, or class would disagree. All had benefited from Will's generosity.

Will was also a great figure in Blackstock's social life. In their early years Will and his wife Daisy were the community's social darlings. A news article from The Chester Reporter dated July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1928 tells of a Blackstock Independence Day festival for which "Mr. W.S Durham announced the Independence themed festival" and his wife Daisy sang "America the Beautiful"<sup>95</sup>. A few years later, with the community gripped by economic depression, the Durhams again made the news for outstanding civic service. This time "Mrs. W.S. Durham hosted a meeting of the Home Demonstration Club<sup>96</sup>." Mrs. Durham had 28 ladies as guests that day for a lesson in home management and a social hour complete with cake. The Durhams also hosted the community in their store 6 days a week. As Eloise McKeown described it, "Mr. Will's store was the meeting place for all Blackstock<sup>97</sup>." On Saturdays it was the center for an impromptu fair. During the week it was a place for employment seekers to gather and for farmers to buy supplies. In the winter it was the store with the pot-bellied stove where "People just came in and stand around" telling "lots of wild stories<sup>98</sup>." In the summer time it was the store with a cooler of Cokes that was used until "the handle fell off the thing<sup>99</sup>." It was the place a black

band might throw an afternoon concert or where the Southern Baptist Church might look for a donation. Mr. Will Durham was the embodiment of Blackstock for many of its residents and the countless visitors. That is why fond memories of a man recalled as “the love of the country” 20 years after his death still help the citizens of a red clay and cotton community remember some bad years as pretty darn good<sup>100</sup>.

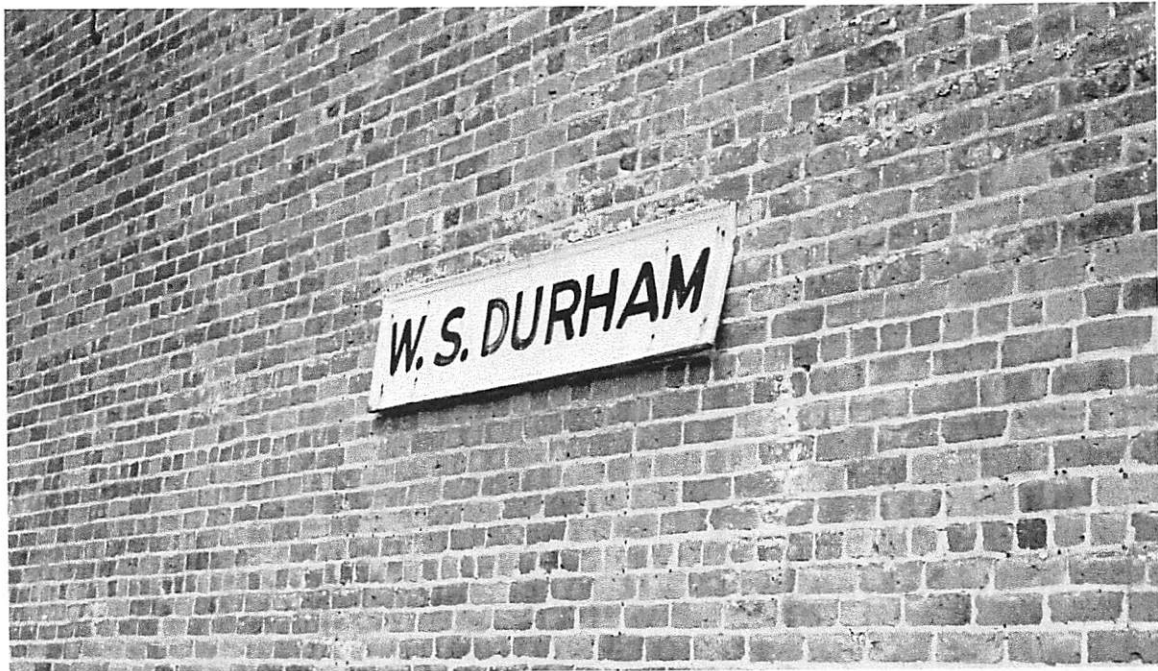
Appendix A

List of Interviewees

Name	Sex	Race	Age	Profession
James Wagers Sr.	Male	White	87	Cotton and Cattle Farmer
William McKeown	Male	White	82	Family Owned a General Store
Eloise McKeown	Female	White	97	Farmer's Daughter, Waitress
Sarah Cassels	Female	White	82	Farmer's Daughter Farmer's Wife
Bernice Ferguson	Female	Black	73	Domestic Servant
Gertrude Davis	Female	Black	91	Domestic Servant
Henry Sanders	Male	White	75	Mechanic's Son
Elizabeth Wagers	Female	White	82	Farmer's Daughter Farmer's Wife

Appendix B

Photographs



**A sign found on the side of the Durham Mercantile and Exchange Company announcing the ownership of Will Durham.**





**The side of the Durham Mercantile Company. The large door to the far right is the loading dock where farmers would load supplies into their wagons and where Mr. Durham would take in goods brought by train.**



**The front of the Durham Mercantile Company building. In the middle of the lettering is the date "1894", the year that the building was erected.**

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## ORAL HISTORY FORM

I, Sarah ~~Condit~~ Cassels, the participant in an interview with  
(name of interviewee)

Wake Forest Student, John Zander, hereby give my permission to use  
(name of student)

this interview to write a paper for History 390, Memory, Culture and the Making of the  
South under the direction of Professor Michele Gillespie.

---

Signature of Person Interviewed: Sarah T. Cassels

Signature of Student: John Zander

Date: 2/28/07

Questions/Concerns? Please Contact:

Dr, Michele Gillespie  
Kahle Associate Professor of History  
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## ORAL HISTORY FORM

I, Elizabeth Wagers, the participant in an interview with  
(name of interviewee)

Wake Forest Student, John Sanders, hereby give my permission to use  
(name of student)

this interview to write a paper for History 390, Memory, Culture and the Making of the  
South under the direction of Professor Michele Gillespie.

---

Signature of Person Interviewed: Elizabeth L. Wagers

Signature of Student: John Sanders

Date: 2/28/07

Questions/Concerns? Please Contact:

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**ORAL HISTORY FORM**

I, Bernice Ferguson, the participant in an interview with  
(name of interviewee)

Wake Forest Student, John Sanders, hereby give my permission to use  
(name of student)

this interview to write a paper for History 390, Memory, Culture and the Making of the South under the direction of Professor Michele Gillespie.

---

Signature of Person Interviewed: Bernice Ferguson

Signature of Student: John Sanders

Date: 2/28/07

Questions/Concerns? Please Contact:

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## ORAL HISTORY FORM

I, Gertrude Davis, the participant in an interview with  
(name of interviewee)

Wake Forest Student, John Sander, hereby give my permission to use  
(name of student)

this interview to write a paper for History 390, Memory, Culture and the Making of the  
South under the direction of Professor Michele Gillespie.

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Signature of Person Interviewed: Gertrude Davis

Signature of Student: John Sander

Date: 2/28/07

Questions/Concerns? Please Contact:

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## ORAL HISTORY FORM

I, William McKeown, the participant in an interview with  
(name of interviewee)

Wake Forest Student, John Sanders, hereby give my permission to use  
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this interview to write a paper for History 390, Memory, Culture and the Making of the  
South under the direction of Professor Michele Gillespie.

---

Signature of Person Interviewed: W. D. McKeown

Signature of Student: John Sanders

Date: 2/28/07

Questions/Concerns? Please Contact:

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## ORAL HISTORY FORM

I, James Zwager, the participant in an interview with  
(name of interviewee)

Wake Forest Student, John Zander, hereby give my permission to use  
(name of student)

this interview to write a paper for History 390, Memory, Culture and the Making of the South under the direction of Professor Michele Gillespie.

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Signature of Person Interviewed: James C. Zwager

Signature of Student: John Zander

Date: 2/28/07

Questions/Concerns? Please Contact:

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## ORAL HISTORY FORM

I, Eloise McKeown, the participant in an interview with  
(name of interviewee)

Wake Forest Student, John Sanders, hereby give my permission to use  
(name of student)

this interview to write a paper for History 390, Memory, Culture and the Making of the  
South under the direction of Professor Michele Gillespie.

Signature of Person Interviewed: Eloise McKeown

Signature of Student: John Sanders

Date: 2/28/07

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ORAL HISTORY FORM

I, Henry Sanders, the participant in an interview with  
(name of interviewee)

Wake Forest Student, John Sanders, hereby give my permission to use  
(name of student)

this interview to write a paper for History 390, Memory, Culture and the Making of the South under the direction of Professor Michele Gillespie.

Signature of Person Interviewed: Henry Sanders

Signature of Student: John Sanders

Date: 2/28/07

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