To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Robert C. McAdams entitled "The Tobacco Culture of Wilson County, North Carolina." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommended that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.

James C. Cobb, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

THE TOBACCO CULTURE
OF
WILSON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Robert C. McAdams
December, 1996

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a social and economic study of the flue-cured tobacco culture in the Coastal Plain North Carolina county of Wilson from the 1880s to the 1990s.

Wilson County had its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century as a part of the traditional southern cotton culture. As cotton prices declined during the 1880s, area planters began to seek alternative investments. Encouraged by development of bright leaf tobacco production in Piedmont, North Carolina, local newspaper editors encouraged planters to experiment with the crop. As did many others in eastern North Carolina, Wilson planters found that the gray soils were well suited for growth of bright tobacco.

With planter investment in production, marketing, and processing, Wilson County developed an economy and society dependent upon flue-cured tobacco. Although New South promoters hoped that the tobacco culture would offer agricultural and industrial diversity, the changes in Wilson's agricultural society and economy were not always positive. Farm sizes declined and tenancy rates increased until the last half of the twentieth century. Local attempts at tobacco processing and manufacturing were short-lived and Wilson never achieved the economic

diversity originally envisioned. The tobacco culture assumed its own social structure in time, providing economic opportunities for a few, but only seasonal work for many.

Tobacco farmers struggled to maintain stable prices for many years, finally asking for government support in the Depression years of the 1930s. The resulting crop control program tended to perpetuate much of the traditional landlord-tenant culture until the 1960s when a change in the program and new technology brought the tobacco culture closer to twentieth century agribusiness. But in spite of the changes in production, many of the social and economic aspects of the earlier years of the century remain within the county.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. AGRICULTURAL BACKGROUNDS	1
2. TOBACCO: WILSON'S NEW SOUTH	39
3. TOBACCO FARMERS: 1880-1940	70
4. THE MARKET SYSTEM	111
5. TOBACCO FACTORIES	145
6. FARMER DISCONTENT AND SOLUTIONS	177
7. SLOW CHANGE ON THE FARM: 1940-1995	216
8. THE TOBACCO CULTURE: AN EPILOGUE	243
BIBLIOGRAPHY	257
APPENDIX	268
VITA	278

CHAPTER 1

AGRICULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

Rural eastern North Carolina today has a physical atmosphere all its own, one that seems to separate it from the other geographical divisions within the state. Spotted with wooded patches of loblolly pine and scrub oak, endless fields fashion a flat landscape wrapping around unpainted tenant houses and becoming the backyards of crossroad towns. Unlike the Piedmont and beyond to the west, the smells in the air seem different. Well before the calendar calls for spring, in late February and early March, the aroma of newly-plowed earth permeates the air. No doubt it is the vast amount of ground laid bare which makes it so noticeable. By "lay by" time in July, the dominant smell is that of growing corn and tobacco, a green odor magnified by the intensity of the twenty-four hour humidity.

Those smells have changed in the last hundred years in eastern North Carolina. The endless fields of green tobacco leaves so typical today actually do not go back much beyond the twentieth century. The giant fields of corn are a product of post-World War II agriculture, not of traditionally self-sufficient farmers interested in mule fodder.

It has been just over a century that the eastern North Carolina town of Wilson, once known as the "The World's

Greatest Tobacco Market," has even been familiar with the crop which provided its claim to fame. Not until the late nineteenth century did flue-cured tobacco cultivation develop in the Coastal Plain of North Carolina. Before tobacco's introduction and expansion in the area, there was a landscape of cotton and corn. Cotton provided the money, and planters produced corn for home use. Jonathan Daniels, whose father grew up in the early years of Wilson County, reminds us of the money-crop typical of the rest of the South: "People got rich on cotton, country rich, before tobacco came."[1]

It is this cotton and corn cultivation in Wilson County's early existence which set the background for the tobacco culture of the late nineteenth century. The soil, the climate, and the economic system of labor and financing which developed around cotton and corn were unforseen parents of Wilson County's economic and social future.

Wilson County was the outgrowth of the early nineteenth century Toisnot community in Edgecombe County, North Carolina. The settlement arose around the Toisnot Primitive Baptist Church, built in 1804 between Tarboro and Smithfield and was named for the Tuscarora Indian village of Tosneoc located in the area during the early eighteenth century. Nearby Contentnea Creek provided residents with a

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[1] Jonathan Daniels, Tar Heels: A Portrait of North Carolina (New York: Dodd, Meade and Co., 1947), 78.

trade outlet for naval stores to the Neuse River and the port of New Bern downstream. The Toisnot settlement was also on the travel route between Raleigh and Greenville.[2]

By the time of the beginnings of Toisnot, there were already attempts to separate it from Edgecombe County. As early as 1732, dissatisfaction arose when western residents complained of the long journey to the county seat in Tarboro. To provide a more convenient county government, area representatives to the North Carolina General Assembly promoted the creation of an additional county in 1737. Although legislators did not pass that bill, it marked the beginning of many similar attempts in the nineteenth century. Other bills in 1804, 1805, 1828, 1829, 1830, 1848, 1850, 1852, and 1854, all followed with equal determination. Finally in 1855 four counties agreed to give up land to create Wilson County. Edgecombe provided 50 percent of the land, and the remainder came from Nash, Johnson, and Wayne counties.[3]

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[2] Edgecombe County Boundaries, Appendix A; Wilson County's 130th Anniversary Committee, History of Wilson County and Its Families (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1985), 5, 8-10; Robert C. Bainbridge and Kate Ohno, Wilson Historic Buildings Inventory, Wilson , North Carolina (Wilson, N.C., City of Wilson, 1980), 4.

[3] Ibid., 9-10; History Book Committee, Wilson, North Carolina: A Pictorial History (Wilson, N.C.: Wilson Chamber of Commerce, 1993), 12-13; Marshal Daniel, "Formation of Wilson County," 1992, Wilson County Public Library, Wilson, N.C.; Kate Ohno, Wilson County's Architectural Heritage (Wilson County, N.C., 1981), 9; Daisy Henley Gold, "A Town

By 1849 the Toisnot community had incorporated as the town of Wilson. Centrally located within the new county, Wilson became the new seat of local government. Area residents named both the town and county for Louis Dicken Wilson of Tarboro. Wilson represented Edgecombe County in the North Carolina General Assembly from 1820 until 1846 when he resigned his office to lead a local regiment in the Mexican War. He died of yellow fever in 1847 while serving as a colonel in the United States Army. Legislators felt that naming the new town and county for Wilson honored his public, political, and military service.[4]

Transportation routes became important to the community early in the nineteenth century. By the 1830s an interlocking network of railroads and highways converged at Toisnot. The Wilmington to Raleigh Railroad reached the Toisnot station in 1836, providing passenger service going both north and south in 1840. By 1853 a well-known plank road linked the new town of Wilson to Greenville.[5]

The coordination of various transportation

Named Wilson," 1949, Wilson County Public Library, Wilson, N.C., 18-21, 48.

[4] Clark Gerow Shreve, " The Development of Education to 1900 in Wilson, North Carolina" (Ph.D, diss., Univ. of North Carolina, 1941), 1-2; David Leroy Corbitt, The Formation of North Carolina Counties, 1663-1943 (Raleigh: North Carolina Archives, 1967), 237-38; Josephus Daniels, Tar Heel Editor (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1939), 144-45; Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 8.

[5] Anniversary Committee, History of Wilson County, 8, 18-19.

alternatives provided area visitors to Wilson a variety of travel opportunities. In 1853 the coach from Greenville arrived on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays around three o'clock, in time for passengers to make connections with the train going south. Coach schedules on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays connected with the steamboat from Greenville to Washington, North Carolina. The Raleigh stage arrived at six o'clock on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for the night and left the next mornings at six.[6]

Early transportation facilities had a positive effect on the community. In 1853 Dr. John T. Walsh, publisher of The Christian Friend, described Wilson as an active "town in the woods" with six turpentine stills, four dry good stores, three grocery stores, two "public houses," several church organizations, but only one church building, a coach factory, and two medical practices. He was pleased to note an active organization of the Sons of Temperance kept Wilson hotels free of bars. He also noted a boot shop, one milliner, three tailors, a gun-smith, several cooper shops and carpenters, one cabinet shop, and one candy store. By 1860, 960 people resided in the town of Wilson, and the Wilson County population reached 9,720.[7] Radiating out within fifteen miles from Wilson, a number of other

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[6] Gold, "Town Named Wilson," 15-16.

[7] Ibid., 16; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ninth Census: 1870 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 53, 226.

towns and communities developed within the county lines during the nineteenth century. To the south some ten miles, the town of Stantonsburg had first incorporated as early as 1817, utilizing Contentnea Creek to ship naval stores and cotton. To the southeast of Wilson, the town of Saratoga located on the Halifax to Goldsboro road and maintained a stage inn and station. Its beginnings evolved around the 1830 formation of White Oak Primitive Baptist Church and grew due to the plank road from Greenville to Wilson. A toll station located in Saratoga collected the three cent per mile toll for use of the road. By 1853, Saratoga had a post office and the Scarborough store in the vicinity and in 1874 became an incorporated town.[8]

Settlers named the early community of Black Creek in southwestern Wilson County for a stream which ran into Contentnea Creek. Benefitted by the Wilmington and Washington Railroad built through the area, by 1840 Black Creek consisted of Bardin's Depot, Arthur Bardin's store, and a post office. The Bardin heirs were selling lots around the depot by 1850.[9]

Other towns in Wilson County emerged later in the century due to business and transportation networks. North

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[8] Wilson County 1879 map, Appendix B; Hugh Buckner Johnston, "Looking Backward," n.d., Wilson County Public Library, Wilson, N.C., 1667; Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 91, 108. Anniversary Committee, History of Wilson County, 12.

[9] Ibid., 10-11; Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 39.

of the county seat, the Elm City community began as Joyner's Depot about 1846 on the Wilmington-Weldon Railroad. By 1873 the town of Toisnot began one mile away. Both areas merged and became known as Elm City in 1913. In the southwestern part of the county, Lucama incorporated in 1887 along the Wilson-Fayetteville Railroad, and the town of Sims emerged after 1900 as an outgrowth of a large lumber company at the northern end of the county. In 1883 the well-known community of Rock Ridge gained its name from a community school which developed in western Wilson County around early grist and saw mills. The development of these towns and communities which grew and thrived around transportation routes during the nineteenth century provided the setting for market agriculture in Wilson County during the years after the Civil War.[10]

Wilson County is located in the Central Coastal Plain of North Carolina. Its 373 square miles measure approximately thirty miles east to west and twenty miles north to south. Although geographical divisions often vary with the interpreter, soil types and county lines indicate that Wilson is one county removed from the Piedmont. Parts of two parent counties, Nash and Johnston, mark the end of the Coastal Plain and the beginnings of the Piedmont at the Wake County line. Wilson County elevations

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[10] Anniversary Committee, History of Wilson County, 11-14.

ranging from 50 to 305 feet are indicative of its proximity to the Piedmont landscape.[11]

Characteristically an eastern North Carolina county in many ways, Wilson's mixed parentage remains evident. North Carolina natives use the soil to classify the divisions between the Piedmont and Coastal Plain, but this method does not necessarily follow county lines. The county's eastern and southern lands are sandy, typical of the Coastal Plain soil types. These sandy soils of the county are more representative of the Edgecombe and Wayne heritage. Yet there is a hint of the red lands of the North Carolina Piedmont in the northwestern areas of the county, more typical of the Nash and Johnston parentage. These fringes of the Piedmont characteristically contain heavy clay soils, decidedly red in color. Reflective of these "red lands," The Soils of North Carolina classifies the county as "Borderline" with 4 percent of the soils as

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[11] Coastal Plain map, Appendix C; Walter Henry Pierce, "Opportunities for Economic Adjustments in Farming Systems, Central Coastal Plain, N.C., with Particular Reference to Small Tobacco Farms, Wilson County" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Minnesota, 1953), 25; Herman Brooks James, "The Effects of the Mechanization of Agriculture in the Northern Tidewater Area of North Carolina" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1949), 25; R. C. Jurney, Soil Survey of Wilson County, North Carolina (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1925), 1; James W. Clay, Douglas M. Orr. Jr., and Alfred W. Stuart, eds., North Carolina Atlas, Portrait of a Changing Southern State (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1975), 6; Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 130-31, 58, 83, 80-82; Thomas M. Byrd, ed., North Carolina Agriculture From the Mountains to the Sea (Raleigh: The North Carolina Association of County Agricultural Agents, 1988), 98.

Piedmont and 96 percent as Coastal Plain. That is in contrast to Nash County to the north with 54 percent of its soil classified as Piedmont and the Piedmont county of Wake to the west consisting of only 8 percent Coastal Plain soils.[12]

The majority of Wilson County's coastal plain soils are of the Norfolk-Ruston variety. Described as "sandy clay," such soils are well-suited to the growth of cotton, peanuts, and tobacco, and classified as "fair to good" for corn, forage crops, hay, and pasture. For North Carolina's Coastal Plain, the Norfolk-Ruston soils are some of the best for agriculture, so much so that very little of the cleared land is unplanted even today, leaving only the less fertile and poorly drained lands in woods. The success of these Coastal Plain soils have depended on commercial fertilizers since before the Civil War.[13]

The climate of Wilson County is also hospitable to agriculture. Located 150 miles from the coast, the county is a recipient of the southern humidity providing needed moisture for many crops. Classified as humid subtropical, Wilson County has mild winters and hot, humid summers with generally adequate rainfall. Zero temperatures are infrequent, as well as are degrees over a hundred. With an

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[12] William D. Lee, The Soils of North Carolina, Their Formation, Identification, and Use (Raleigh,N.C.: North Carolina Experiment Station, 1955), 41.

[13] Ibid., 140-41.

average January temperature of 44-48 degrees and only four to six inches of snowfall annually, outside farm work is possible year-round. The last of the damaging frosts are between April 1-21, creating a 210-230 day growing season.[14]

Although many who live in the South have often lamented the heat and humidity of the region, there are agricultural advantages to warm, moist weather, and human beings are able to adapt to the climate with changes in work styles and architectural designs. In Wilson County the climate and soils have been important in the creation of an agricultural economy. Crops of cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, and small grains have thrived in the long growing season of eastern North Carolina since the antebellum period.[15]

Climate and soils made the communities soon to be Wilson County into cotton cultivators while the area remained a part of Edgecombe. Aided by the use of scientific agricultural methods, Edgecombe was the leading cotton producing county in North Carolina by 1850. That same year, Edgecombe County planters followed a trend throughout the South and organized an agricultural society

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[14] Clay, North Carolina Atlas,93-101; Pierce, "Economic Adjustments," 29.

[15] Rupert B. Vance, Human Geography of the South: A Study in Regional Resources and Human Adequacy (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1932), 351-441.

which spent much effort on the study of marl, a local soil rich in calcium carbonate. A Town Creek farmer produced over 400 pounds per acre of cotton in 1852 by fertilizing land with marl, but in spite of crop successes, planters had difficulty in digging large amounts of the soil. By 1858 Wilson County resident Thomas F. Christman invented a marl digger capable of digging 1,500 bushels an hour with the help of eight workers. Christman was carrying forth Edgecombe's agricultural successes into the farming culture of newly-formed Wilson County.[16]

As a whole, North Carolina was a rural farming state, but never developed the large plantation economy known in other areas of the South. The North Carolina Piedmont and lands westward held soils and topography unsuitable for a large scale agricultural economy, although the Coastal Plain was more suitable for large plantations. Wilson County's location placed it on the border of the plantation economy.[17]

Josephus Daniels, who grew up in the town of Wilson in the 1860s and 1870s, characterized the region as a mixture of a few large plantations and many small farms. In 1860

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[16] Cornelius Oliver Cathy, Agricultural Developments in North Carolina, 1783-1860 (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1956), 107; J. Kelly Turner and Jno L. Bridgers, Jr., History of Edgecombe County, North Carolina (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton Printing Co., 1920), 332-34.

[17] Cathy, Agricultural Developments, 44; Clay, North Carolina Atlas, 7.

out of the 526 Wilson County farms, 311 were below 100 acres with 199 other farms having 100-500 acres. Large farms were limited in the county: only 11 farms consisted of 500-1,000 acres, and only five plantations had land holdings of over 1,000.[18]

The limited number of large plantations in Wilson County mirrored the average size of slaveholdings in the area. Although a few large slaveholders existed, the majority of owners owned only small numbers of slaves. In 1860, 402 of Wilson's 446 slaveholders owned nineteen or less slaves, and of that number, 336 owned nine or less. Only one owner had 70-100 slaves. These numbers reflected Josephus Daniels' opinion that there was "no great gulf fixed, as in the Deep South, between the slaveholding and the nonslaveholding whites in Wilson, or like counties in North Carolina."[19]

Wilson County's slave numbers in 1860 were about 36 percent of the total county population, similar to parent counties Wayne, Johnston, and Nash. There were area counties with much higher slave percentages. To the east, the population of parent county Edgecombe was 58 percent slave, and even the Piedmont county of Wake to the west had

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[18] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 151; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eighth Census: 1860 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 210.

[19] Ibid., 236; Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 151.

almost a 60 percent slave population.[20]

The concentrations of large slaveowners were predominately in eastern Wilson County in the former Edgecombe lands where soils were typical of the Coastal Plain. Coinciding with its large cotton production, Edgecombe was one of the North Carolina counties with high percentages of slaves in 1850, just five years before its cession of land to Wilson. Saratoga and Gardners Townships, areas also separated from Edgecombe, held twenty-three of the forty-four planters with twenty or more slaves.[21]

Wilson's largest planters were represented by the three Barnes brothers. Born between 1809 and 1813 in the area of Edgecombe which later became a part of Wilson, Elias, William, and Joshua were large landowners by the 1850s. Elias, of the Saratoga Township, died in 1856 and left his estate to his widow Mahala. William Barnes, also of the Saratoga Township, accumulated over one thousand acres and was the largest slaveholder in the county in 1860 with seventy-nine slaves. The youngest brother, General Joshua Barnes of the Wilson District owned sixty-seven

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[20] Eighth Census, 274-275.

[21] Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 4; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Seventh Census: 1850 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1854), 284; U.S. Manuscript Census: 1860, Slave Reel 42, Wilson County, N.C.

slaves in 1860 and held 2,140 acres by 1869.[22]

The end of slavery in 1865 did not eliminate all the large planters in Wilson County. Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1869 listed ten "prominent farmers" with landholdings of over a thousand acres within the county lines. Six of those ten were among the forty-four planters in 1860 with twenty or more slaves. While these planters held onto their land after the war, they evidently broke up their plantations into smaller units. The 1870 census indicated that Wilson County's number of large farms over 1,000 acres had dropped to only three, and the total number of farms had increased to 616.[23]

With emancipation of the slaves in 1865, Wilson County planters had to restructure traditional labor systems. The end of the "peculiar institution" represented a financial loss, but the limited numbers of large slave owners in the county made the recovery less difficult. The financial losses of slaveowners became both economic and social gains for the freedmen who hoped to have some control over their fate.[24]

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[22] Ohno, Architectural History, 94, 118; Bainbridge, Historic Buildings Inventory, 229; Manuscript Census: 1860, Slave Reel 41-42, 16.

[23] Branson's North Carolina Business Directory, 1869, Raleigh: Levi Branson Office Publishing Co.,1869; Ninth Census, 360; Gavin Wright, The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century (New York, W.W. Norton and Co.,1978), 161.

[24] Dwight B. Billings Jr., Planters and the Making of a "New South:" Class, Politics,and Development in North Carolina, 1865-1900 (Univ. of North Carolina Press, Chapel

The end of slavery created confusion and uncertainty for both white landowners and black laborers. In North Carolina and other states, freedom for former slaves resulted initially in a labor shortage which was counteracted by adoption of legislation to hold the laborers on the plantations. In spite of various laws, there was still a reduction of black workers. For a newly freed people, the refusal to work was an attempt to assert independence long denied under slavery. While slaveowners once forced slaves of all ages and both sexes to work in the fields, families of freedmen tried to reduce field work of women and the elderly as much as possible. Those numbers alone reduced the labor force along with others who resisted work as an assertion of new freedoms.[25]

Wilson County maintained population growth from 1860-1880, although many North Carolina areas experienced labor shortages due to out-migration of freedmen going west or

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Hill, 1979), 42.; Gilbert Fite, Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980 (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1984), 1; Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 44, 52; James C. Cobb, The Most Southern place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 31-32.

[25] Jay R. Mandele, The Roots of Black Poverty: The Southern Plantation Economy After the Civil War (Duke University Press, Durham, 1978), 23; Ransom, One Kind of Freedom, 39, 44-48, 55, 66-67, 101; Ralph Shlomowitz, "The Origins of Southern Sharecropping," Agricultural History 53 (July, 1979): 572.

north. With labor troubles, some planters hoped to attract white immigrant workers to the South. Dr. S. S. Satchwell, the former surgeon-in-chief at the Confederate Military Hospital in Wilson during the war years, addressed the North Carolina Immigration Association in 1869 stressing the need for new laborers from outside the area. In spite of attempts throughout the South, attraction of immigrants was not a successful alternative to the labor problems, so planters had to utilize existing workers within their area.[26]

Both blacks and whites had to come to terms in order to negotiate new labor arrangements. Blacks sought more freedoms and opportunities while whites feared a loss of control, both socially and economically. Blacks had agricultural skills, while there were white planters with land and labor needs. By 1866 many planters began to negotiate labor arrangements with the freedmen, often through the Freedmen's Bureau. Planters, short on currency after the war, often offered shares of the crop as wages. As cotton prices dropped in the late 1860s, share wages allowed planters to share the risk of the crop with the

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[26] Statistical Service Center, County Population Trends, North Carolina, 1790-1960 (Raleigh: North Carolina Dept. of Administration, 1969), 103; Hugh T. Lefler, History of North Carolina, (New York, Lewis Historical Publications, 1956), 587-88; Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 61; Robert L. Brandfon, Cotton Kingdom of the New South: A History of the Yazoo Mississippi Delta From Reconstruction to the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Press, 1967), 136.

laborers and keep them on the farm throughout the growing season. For most freedmen, the wage system still meant gang labor reminiscent of slavery. Blacks wanted to be able to replicate the freedoms of the white society and found that gangs and squads were led by foremen or overseers, allowing few opportunities for individual decisions.[27]

After a period of adjustment, the labor organization of share wages evolved into a tenant-share system. Rupert Vance described the new labor arrangement as a "primitive barter system, ... whereby labor was secured without money wages and land without money rent." For freedmen who preferred the opportunity to work with less supervision, sharecropping was an opportunity to be rewarded for individual work and diligence. Through the tenant-share system involving both black and white labor, the planters were able to maintain control over their farming enterprises, pay for much of the labor with a share of the crop, and entice workers to stay on the farm until harvest. By 1880, tenants farmed one third of North Carolina farms, with white tenants outnumbering blacks.[28]

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[27] Mandele, Roots of Black Poverty, 17-18; Cobb, Most Southern Place, 41-50; Ransom, One Kind of Freedom, 59-67; Wright, Political Economy, 163; Shlonowitz, "Southern Sharecropping," 568-72.

[28] Vance, Human Geography, 187; Ransom, One Kind of Freedom, 67, 94-95; William S. Powell, North Carolina Through Four Centuries (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1989), 417.

Southern farmers had become familiar with a white tenant farm system used in the pre-Civil War years. In areas of high land values, it was not unusual for a tenant system to provide job opportunities for beginning farmers. Often farmers paid the rent with a division of the crops at harvest time. Landowners and tenants sometimes equally divided crops grown on the best land, but on less fertile land the tenant may have paid one-third or two-fifths of the crop as rent. Other methods of renting were based on the value of the crop grown or the investment and labor needed for crop production. Generally the lease agreement was an annual arrangement.[29]

Typical of other areas of North Carolina, Wilson County farm sizes dropped and farm numbers rose with the advent of the tenant-share system. Improved land declined during the decade of the 1860s from 61,366 to 55,416 acres, indicating less planted land, and farm numbers rose from 526 to 616. As planters restructured plantations into family-farm units, they had slave houses moved to various areas of plantations to accommodate tenant families needed in the new labor system.[30]

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[29] Lewis Cecil Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States, vol. 2. (Glouester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958), 646-47; Ransom, One Kind of Freedom, 88; Harold D. Woodman, "Post-Civil War Southern Agriculture and the Law." Agricultural History 53 (Jan. 1979): 326.

[30] Eighth Census, 108, 210; Ninth Census, 218, 360; Gavin Wright, Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War (New York, Basic Books, Inc.,

With variations, there were two general categories of farm renters in North Carolina: tenants and sharecroppers. Defined legally in 1874, the distinction depended upon what the landlord "furnished" in the agreement. If the landowner supplied only land, the law defined the arrangement as tenancy. The tenant could rent with a payment of cash or goods at a specific time during the year, often at the beginning or the end, or he could rent by payment of a share of the crop. If the landlord invested farm tools, work stock, and fertilizer, the law defined the arrangement as a sharecropping contract.[31]

In reality, there was not a clear delineation between a tenant and a cropper, since both arrangements could involve shares of the crop. Wilson County share agreements demonstrated this confusion, especially as the share contract developed. Landowners probably based early agreements on pre-war leases, using adaptations to meet specific needs of the post-war years. The Wilson County contract between Wilie Woodard and Wilie Boswell in 1866 is an example of a share tenant agreement illustrating aspects of the pre-war lease. Unusual for the time was the contract length of seven years. Typical was the payment of

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1986), 87-88.

[31] Lefler, History of North Carolina, 594; Charles Mangum, Jr., The Legal Status of the Tenant Farmer in the Southeast (Chapel Hill; Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1952), 12.

rent in shares: one-third of the corn, one-third of the fodder, one-fourth of the cotton, and one-fourth of the small grains. The agreement limited cotton to ten acres, but there was accommodation for extra cotton plantings. Also keeping with other oral and written arrangements in North Carolina, Woodard allowed Wilie Boswell to have land to plant garden and potato patches and access to a wood lot for timber for repairs and fuel. Landowner Woodard was careful to make provisions in case of default or death to protect his interests.[32]

The Wilie Boswell rental contract probably resembles the pre-war agreements made between white landowners and white farmers. Boswell was economically able to furnish his own farm tools and equipment, workstock, and labor. There is no mention of Woodard furnishing him with provisions or other necessities during the crop years. The length of the lease most likely indicates that Boswell was a creditable farmer.

The 1868 agreement between James S. Woodard and Gray Webb demonstrates further evolution of the share tenant contract in Wilson County. Born in 1833, Captain James Simms Woodard grew up on a plantation in what is today the

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[32] Cobb, Most Southern Place, 73; Wilson County Record of Deeds, vol. 21, Wilson County Court House, Wilson, N.C., 1-2; Woodard-Boswell contract, Appendix D; I. A. Newby, Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence, 1880-1915 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1987), 27.

Gardners township of Wilson County. His father was one of the most prominent landowners in the area. Woodard studied at the University of North Carolina, was admitted to the North Carolina bar, and practiced law in the town of Wilson. During the Civil War he led Company C of the Forty-Third Regiment through the entire war, fighting at Gettysburg. Returning from the war, Woodard resumed his law practice until he retired to his farm in 1878 to spend time as a Primitive Baptist preacher until his death in 1912. Gray Webb listed in the 1880 census was a forty-nine year old white farmer with a wife and three children, ages seven to two years old. At the time of the contract Webb would have been a young man of twenty-seven.[33]

The Woodard-Webb contract dated in March of 1868 was based on fourths: Woodard received-one fourth of the "composted" cotton and corn, but one-third of that without fertilizer. Woodard would furnish Webb up to two hundred dollars worth of "money, provisions, farming tools" with a lien on the crop to insure payment. Webb was already indebted to Woodard and the contract provided arrangements for Webb to pay Woodard the value of the $198.00 debt in work stock, hogs and cattle, a cart, and the whole crop for which he was contracting if he could not come up with the

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[33] Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 76; Gold, "Town Named Wilson," 40, 56; J. Robert Boykin, Wilson County, North Carolina 1880 Census, 1984, Hackney Library, Barton College, Wilson, N.C., 452.

payment by January 1869.[34]

Both the Wilie Woodard and James Woodard contracts contain provisions typical of other share agreements in North Carolina. While the contracts may have been carryovers from antebellum rental agreements, they indicate a standardization of the share tenant contract and the crop lien in Wilson County by 1868. In both cases the tenants rented the cotton crop for a fourth, although other designated crops rented for thirds or fourths. Both contracts were with white renters and probably did not fully represent the oral contracts made by many landlords and renters, both black and white. Woodard did not specify specific goods or tools he was willing to furnish, only a money limit. It was this aspect of the Woodard-Gray agreement that placed it in the share tenant contract. Gray was financed by Woodard, but he evidently provided his own workstock and tools as would a share tenant. Both tenants had at least limited opportunities to make management decisions in their farm operations.

Share tenancy was not applicable to many other farmers in Wilson County. They had to farm as sharecroppers. While the tenant farmer was pre-Civil War, the sharecropper was a post-war adaptation of the share system. Harold Woodman has called sharecropping "the South's new peculiar

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[34] Wilson County Record of Deeds, Book 2, 352-53; Woodard-Webb contract, Appendix E.

institution." Planters of Wilson County realized that there were farmers who would have to be provided provisions through the farming season in order to produce a crop for sale. The lack of banking and credit institutions prevented other opportunities for the financing of farm labor, so some planters entered into agreements, both oral and written, to "furnish" credit or provisions for these farmers through the growing season until harvest.[35]

Although Wilie Boswell and Gray Webb had to secure money to run the farm, they owned their farm equipment. For many black as well as white tenants, planters found that they had to go a step further and provide even more investment in the farming operation. In addition to land and buildings, housing, and fuel provided in the share tenant arrangement, landlords provided farming equipment, workstock, seed and fertilizer in a sharecropper agreement. Usually the agreement called for an equal division of the crop between the landowner and sharecropper. Since all the sharecropper provided was his family's work, he was defined as a laborer getting a portion of the crop as his wage.[36]

To the white landlord, the cropper was only a wage laborer without any claim to the crop excepting the share wage at harvest. To former slaves the sharecropping system

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[35] Woodman, " Agriculture and the Law," 326.

[36] Ransom, One Kind Of Freedom, 90-91; Fite, Cotton Fields, 4.

offered less supervision and more economic and social dignity than ever before. To white croppers, the system was a way to farm when there was no capital available, offering the hope of eventually advancing to a share or cash tenant. Of the 1,914 Wilson County farms in 1890, there were 103 operated by cash tenants and 863 operated by share tenants and sharecroppers.[37]

Large and small landowners, tenants and sharecroppers of Wilson County were tied closely to the cultivation of cotton. A hot, dry weather crop, cotton could be grown throughout the South. It was durable once picked and ginned, thus not in need of being sold immediately, and therefore a suitable crop to mortgage. By 1860 the five-year-old county produced 3,012 four hundred pound bales of cotton. Within twenty years farmers raised 13,049 bales.[38]

Based upon a world-wide demand, the cotton crop varied in price from six to eight cents per pound before the Civil War. Years of high prices began in the late 1850s and

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[37] Woodman, "Agriculture and the Law," 325; Mandele, Roots of Black Poverty, 45; Vance, Human Geography, 190; Cobb, Most Southern Place, 71; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eleventh Census: 1890 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 170-71.

[38] Sam Bowers Hilliard, Atlas of Antebellum Agriculture (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1984), 66, 71; Wright, Political Economy, 14, 167; Eighth Census, 109; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Tenth Census: 1880 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 803; Fite, Cotton Fields, 9.

lasted through the war years. Even though the prices began to drop by the mid-1860s, they remained high enough through the 1870s to make a profit for cotton planters. Although shortages of cotton during and after the war years kept prices up, by 1878-79 production recovered to the 1859-60 levels in the South.[39]

Farmers found Wilson County soils to be suitable for cotton and other crops as long as they fertilized them. Antebellum farmers enriched soils with manure, old stalks, lime and marl, but between 1845-1860 they began to use guano for fertilization. "Guano" originally referred to bird excrement high in nitrogen and phosphorous and mined in the coastal islands of Peru. By the 1850s North Carolina farmers paid from forty to seventy dollars a ton for the fertilizer. By 1867 the first commercial phosphate mines opened on the South Carolina coast near Charleston, and by the 1880s fertilizer plants were a part of most southern states. The cost of this fertilizer was much more affordable for area planters and created a new day in Carolina agriculture. By purchasing Carolina fertilizer rather than Peruvian guano, farmers could purchase twice

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[39] Gray, History of Agriculture, 719-20, 700; Ransom, One Kind of Freedom, 64, 192; Hugh Lefler and Albert Newsome, North Carolina, the History of a Southern State, (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1973), 59; Wright, Political Economy, 98.

the tonnage for the same price.[40]

Use of increased commercial fertilizers offered the opportunity for many farmers to escalate cotton production after the war. Planters hoped that commercial fertilizer would produce larger yields to offset declining crop prices. Southern farms led the nation in fertilizer consumption in the nineteenth century, with North Carolina farms topping the list by the 1920s.[41]

By 1878 Wilson farmers could read multiple newspaper advertisements for fertilizer products. Branch, Hadley & Company advertised "Cotton Food" at the rate of one ton to produce 425 pounds of cotton, "furnished to farmers on the usual accommodating terms." If that was unsuitable to farmers' needs, the same company offered Navassa Acid Phosphate, advertised to produce 310 pounds of middling cotton. The increased use of fertilizer could increase crop production but also could increase debt in the furnishing system of the tenant-share arrangements and the lien. Tenants and croppers often purchased fertilizer where they had credit, while other farmers sought

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[40] Ibid., 19-21; Gray, History of Agriculture, 701; Cathy, Agricultural Developments, 97; T.E. Ricks, ed. Nash County Historical Notes: A Bicentennial Tribute (Rocky Mount, N.C.: Dixie Printing and Publishing Co., 1976), 215; Richard C. Sheridan, "Chemical Fertilizers in Southern Agriculture," Agricultural History 53 (Jan. 1979): 308-310.

[41] Joe Reid, "The Evolution and Implications of Southern Tenancy," Agricultural History 53 (Jan. 1979): 167; Ransom, One Kind of Freedom, 187.

convenience and price. John Revell of the Spring Hill Township in southern Wilson County went to adjoining Wayne County to purchase Peruvian guano in 1879.[42]

John Thomas Revell, born the year before the county's formation, became a prominent planter in post-war Wilson County. In 1880 at age twenty-five, Revell of Spring Hill Township was unmarried, maintaining a home with his father John H. Revell and mother Elizabeth. Apparently his half-sister also lived in the household. In 1882 Revell had a new home built, married in 1884 after the death of both parents, had a large family, and became the owner of over 1500 acres of farm land and rental property. By 1884 Branson's North Carolina Business Directory listed Revell as one of Wilson County's prominent farmers.[43]

Engaged in the day-to-day business of his farm, Revell provided management as well as physical labor, producing crops of cotton, corn, wheat, and sweet potatoes. Like most other area farmers, Revell placed most effort on his cotton crop. Cotton was the crop which he sold on the market for income. Cotton was the crop of precedence, gaining dominance over other crops if time became a premium. It too was often the most discussed and pampered

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[42] The Wilson Advance, April 19, 1878; John Thomas Revell Diary, Nov. 14, 1879, Department of Cultural Resources, Archives and Records Section, Raleigh, N.C., 48.

[43] Boykin, 1880 Census, 363; Revell Diary, 69, 81, 82, 114-15; Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 105.

crop.[44]

Cotton farming in the antebellum period required few skills and little equipment. Many agricultural practices and techniques changed little from the pre-Civil War days until well into the twentieth century. By the 1840s most planters had established basic agricultural practices and horse-drawn plows and planters were close to their peak of technological achievement.[45]

Cotton production was really not a year-round activity, although it would have been hard to convince an industrious farmer of that. Generally following the calendar year, the farmer's first work activity involved cutting the stalks from the last crop. Often farmers broke down old stalks by dragging the field with a log pulled by a draft animal on a cold day. Others hit each frozen stalk with a stick. Such an activity, no matter how accomplished, would provide an unencumbered landscape better suited for the plow, no matter what crop was to be planted back the next season.[46]

Farmers began land preparation at suitable times in

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[44] Revell Diary, 45-46.

[45] John Hebron Moore, The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 170-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1988), 42.

[46] Pete Daniel, Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880 (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1985), 156; Ryon Alender Page, Our Way of Life: The Odyssey of a Farm Family (Fairfax, Va.: By the author, 1982), 33.

late winter when the soil was dry enough to plow. Sandy lands of the Eastern North Carolina Coastal Plain dried quicker than heavier clay soils, but the slope of the field also affected the drainage. If the breaking could be done before the weather became too warm, it was easier on both man and beast. Most farmers throughout the South plowed with walking implements and the physical activity aided in maintaining body heat in cold weather but was a hindrance in hot weather. Cold weather kept the draft animals from becoming overheated and limited the need for as many rest stops, one of the most time-consuming aspects of the plowing process.[47]

John Revell accomplished some plowing in the fall, but usually began to break land in January. The process continued into March when he smoothed the plowed land with a drag harrow and "laid off" rows for corn and cotton. In 1879 he was "half done planting corn" by March 27 in order to be ready to plant cotton sometime in April. April 28 of the same year Revell had planted half of his cotton acres, although in other years he did not start planting cotton until the last of the month.[48]

Cotton planting changed very little in the South until well into the twentieth century. Longtime Wilsonian Roy

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[47] Gray, History of Agriculture, 700; Moore, Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom, 37.

[48] Revell Diary, 35, 60, 57, 66, 39, 40, 54.

Taylor, whose family sharecropped in Wayne County, remembered "sowing guano" to plant cotton in the 1930s. Using a mule-drawn fertilizer distributor, he had to calculate the amount to release on a given amount of land, set a lever on the distributor, then drive the mule down each row. Taylor remembered the experience on a dry, windy day in open fields: "The guano settles on the face and makes it look an ashen-white. It covers the ears and whitens the eyebrows." Using a one-horse plow, a second worker ridged up the row and covered the fertilizer.[49]

Farmers planted the cotton immediately or several weeks later, depending on the weather and workloads. The planter, consisting of a seed hopper with a front wheel and back handles, pulled by one mule, ran on top of the ridge and pressed the seed into the ground. In spite of the planter's spacing, the cotton germinated too thickly to grow successfully, and labor was necessary to "chop" plants to a twelve inch stand. Working with a hoe, laborers thinned plants as well as "flat weeded" the grass from rows.[50]

John Revel in the 1880s cultivated his cotton crop with both plow and hoe labor until the last of June or the first of July, when the cotton was "laid by" with the final

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[49] Roy G. Taylor, Sharecroppers: The Way We Really Were (Wilson N. C.: By the author, 1984), 62-63.

[50] Ibid.; Gray, History of Agriculture, 700-702; Daniel, Breaking the Land, 157.

plowing. A variety of insects and ailments could harm the cotton, both before and after lay-by time. From antebellum times until well into the twentieth century, farmers used Paris Green and Arsenic of Lead to kill insects. The boll weevil was not a problem for North Carolina farmers until the 1920s. Both too much a well as too little rainfall could harm cotton. If the crop survived the growing season, by September cotton bolls were opening and ready to be picked.[51]

Generally farmers picked over cotton fields three times during the harvest season, gathering bolls from the bottom, the middle, and finally the top. Most pickers placed the cotton in a sack made from fertilizer bags with a shoulder strap. Pickers emptied full sacks into cotton sheets or baskets, later weighed to determine a picker's wage. Pickers tried to accomplish as much work as they could before the heat of the day, knowing that cotton with morning dew maintained moisture and weighed more. A few pickers could harvest up to 300 pounds of seed cotton a day.[52]

Farmers usually housed cotton in a storage shelter until enough accumulated to produce a bale at the local

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[51] Gray, History of Agriculture, 702-4, 707-8; Ransom, One Kind of Freedom, 172; Revell Diary, 63.

[52] Gray, History of Agriculture, 702; Page, Our Way of Life, 46; Daniel, Breaking the Land, 158-59; Taylor, Sharecroppers, 8-9.

gin. A two horse-wagon with sideboards four feet high could carry enough cotton to make a bale. Gins were often crowded during the fall picking season, so farmers arrived at all hours of the day to get in line, often obtaining a number, then leaving to return later.[53]

The cotton seed was the heaviest part of the cotton boll; twelve to fourteen hundred pounds of seed cotton made only one five hundred pound bale. Initially located on individual plantations in the antebellum South, cotton gins were a part of the rural and urban landscapes in the post-Civil War period until the mid-twentieth century. At least two cotton gins existed in Wilson County in 1872, both operated by steam power.[54]

Once the planter had the cotton baled, he could sell immediately or wait for better prices. The cotton factor who had managed the sales of the antebellum planter's crop provided credit before the harvest and sold the cotton during the year. After the Civil War planters sold to local buyers. By 1885 Wilson was quite a regional cotton market, handling its own cotton plus 23,000 other bales coming from the surrounding counties. In 1889 there were at least eight individuals or companies buying cotton

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[53] Theodore Rosengarten, All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 118; Page, Our Way Of Life, 45.

[54] Daniel, Breaking the Land, 159; Gray, History of Agriculture, 681, 704-705; Branson's Business Directory, 1872.

around the town of Wilson and one in the county.[55]

The town of Wilson "was strictly a cotton town," according to Josephus Daniels who spent his early years there from 1865 until the mid-1880s. With little manufacturing, the Wilson economy operated on a seasonal basis. Most rural farm residents "settled up" their debts during the fall harvest season when their crops were sold. Tenants like Wilie Boswell and Gray Webb attempted to "pay out" during the harvest, while landlords, furnishing merchants, and cotton buyers depended on a large portion of their yearly income. The harvest season also offered seasonal laborers from town the opportunity for additional spending money earned by picking cotton. Before school opened the first Monday in October, schoolboys like Daniels worked in the cotton crop for twenty-five cents per day.[56]

Cotton was not the only farm crop produced in Wilson County. Farmers grew corn, sweet potatoes, and small grains, but corn far dominated the county's acreage. In 1884, Wilson County farmers grew 27,288 acres of corn, almost 4,000 more acres than cotton. Farmers grew all other crops in smaller amounts and, like corn, raised them

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[55] Gray, History of Agriculture, 711-14, 720; Ransom, One Kind of Freedom, 109; Revell Diary, 46, 49, 96; John Lathem, ed.,Historical and Descriptive Review of the State of North Carolina, vol. 2 (Charleston, S.C.: Empire Publishing Co., 1885), 164; Branson's Business Directory, 1890, 706.

[56] Gold, "Town Named Wilson," 67; Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 56.

for home use. Census reports indicate a decline in bushels of corn grown between 1860 and 1870, but a production recovery by 1880, reflecting the declines in improved land during those years.[57]

Although farmers grew cotton to provide the monetary needs on Wilson County farms, corn was a necessary commodity for both man and beast. The dry corn could be milled into meal of various consistency and used to produce corn bread, grits, and mush. Livestock ate the grain either from the cob or shelled as well as the fodder and shucks. Some southern farmers felt that corn was more nutritious than oats for horses and mules.[58]

With its many uses, farmers could hardly avoid planting corn, yet its cultivation created labor competition with cotton. Planting flexibility of corn of several months offered some adjustment, allowing a farmer to fit the crop around the land preparation and planting of cotton. Some alterations in fodder pulling and grain harvest in the fall also could be controlled based on planting time. Dry corn could remain in the field until well into the winter if necessary before gathering.[59]

Corn production was not as labor intensive as that of

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[57] Hilliard, Atlas of Agriculture, 63-66; Eighth Census, 108-9; Ninth Census, 218-19; Tenth Census, 800, 721.

[58] Cathy, Agricultural Developments, 126-29; Moore, Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom, 55.

[59] Gray, History of Agriculture, 707.

cotton. Even before the end of the antebellum period, farmers planted corn in rows with a mechanical planter and cultivated with a plow. This mechanization reduced hoeing, and some antebellum farmers did not hoe corn at all. As cotton became more important to southern agriculture in the post-war years, corn cultivation seemed less important.[60]

Southern corn production often involved a form of double-cropping by interplanting peas in the corn rows or row middles or even alternating a row of corn and a row of peas. These "field peas" provided food for both the farm family as well as livestock, but the peas also were a part of the fertilization program. As other legumes, peas provided nitrogen for the corn crop, and aided in land improvement benefits when the roughage was plowed into the soil. Both corn stalks and pea vines aided in preventing winter soil erosion, especially if the land was not plowed until spring. Livestock also ate pea vines in both the dry and green forms. Landlords recognized the benefits from pea planting: The Woodard-Webb rental contract required the picking of the peas, probably for the seed to insure future planting in the corn. On most farms the practice of interplanting peas in corn decreased as commercial fertilizer increased.[61]

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[60] Reid, "Evolution of Tenancy," 160-61.

[61] Cathy, Agricultural Developments, 133; Carvelle Earle, "The Price of Precocity: Technical Choice and Ecological Constraint in the Cotton South, 1840-1890," Agricultural

John Revell began the first stage of the corn harvest in August by cutting corn tops and pulling fodder. The work usually began after the ear was well in the drying process and the leaves were just beginning to turn brown. Farmers usually completed the work by the middle of September. Using a machete-like corn knife, Revell severed the corn stalks just above the ear, shocked them, and let them dry in the field before hauling to a barn or stack.[62]

Often farmers pulled fodder around the same time that they cut corn tops. The August heat and humidity could be severe in corn fields where little air circulation made work difficult for harvesters. Antebellum planters had feared for the health of their slaves because of the heat, but post-war North Carolinians endured the work. The process required the worker to start at the top of the plant and strip the leaves to the bottom. After the laborer had both hands full, he tied the bundle with a few leaves, hooked it on a bent stalk, and allowed it to dry in the field. Fodder pulling lasted well into the 1930s when Roy Taylor remembered the experience:

> My face is burning up and I'll bet it looks like the blood is going to pop out. And hot! God Almighty! How can it git this hot? And it's as bad when we go to git it up. May be worse. And I'll be the one that has to stack it around that pole."

History 66 (Summer 1992): 39-40.

[62] Revell Diary, 33, 56, 45, 58.

As Taylor indicated, farmers could store dry fodder in stacks outside. The whole procedure provided southern farmers an opportunity to produce winter roughage for livestock without machinery or storage buildings.[63]

Revell began "pulling corn" about the second week of October and finished "housing" the corn the third week in November. For Roy Taylor, the corn harvest did not start until mid-November. The harvesters "broke" the ears from the stalk and threw them into "heap" piles, later throwing it on the wagon to haul to the barn, corn crib, or pack house.[64]

If farmers planned a corn shucking, the corn was thrown in the barnyard, later to be placed under cover when shucked. Although fifty years separated Revell and Taylor, the corn shuckings changed little. The activity was a form of social entertainment usually held at night. In November of 1879, Ravell attended shuckings "ten nights in a row." Taylor described the corn shuckings as "more fun nights than work spells," with possible home-made alcohol and a banjo "hoe-down." Farmers fed both corn and the shucks to livestock.[65]

Since before the creation of Wilson County in 1855

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[63] Moore, Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom, 53-54; Taylor, Sharecroppers, 218-19.

[64] Revell Diary, 45, 78; Taylor, Sharecroppers, 17.

[65] Revell Diary, 48; Taylor, Sharecropping, 18-19.

both urban and rural residents depended on agriculture to provide a living. Surrounded by hospitable soil and climate, planters developed a cotton and corn culture during the antebellum years. Early transportation routes provided a market economy for agricultural crops in Wilson and its surrounding towns and communities. The loss of slave labor forced landowners to negotiate with freedmen and develop labor arrangements acceptable to both. By the 1880s landlords developed standardized tenant and sharecropper contracts, incorporating the lien system into practices of furnishing. While farmers decreased corn production, they increased cotton acreage, but the cultivation of both crops standardized the farmer's calendar and perpetuated the agrarian culture. The cotton and corn culture dominated Wilson County's agricultural economy and society through the 1880s.

The beginning years of Wilson County from 1855-1880 created a background for much of the economic and social history of the county for the next one hundred years. During those years many rural and urban residents continued to rely on the soils and climate to provide livelihoods. Although tobacco production decreased the importance of both cotton and corn crops by the last decade of the nineteenth century, many of the patterns of land ownership, labor arrangements, and agrarian technology were in place.

CHAPTER 2

TOBACCO: WILSON'S NEW SOUTH

While Wilson County farmers John Revell and Grey Webb cultivated cotton and corn, Piedmont North Carolina farmers on the Virginia line were developing the production of bright leaf tobacco. Encouraged by consumer demands for tobacco products, Piedmont planters worked to perfect a new variation of a traditional southern crop through production and curing methods.

The development of bright tobacco came at a time when the South's cotton production faced difficult times. As cotton production again reached pre-war levels, the post-Civil War price decline continued at a faster rate. Southern cotton farmers assumed more debt, the tenant-cropper systems increased, and the lien became more oppressive.

By the 1880s Wilson County cotton planters were economically depressed. As county leaders sought agricultural alternatives, they realized the potential for flue-cured tobacco production in the area. Aware of the growing popularity of the cigarette, newspaper editor Josephus Daniels began a crusade to educate farmers on the economic benefits of bright tobacco cultivation in Wilson County. As growers increased plantings of bright tobacco and learned the techniques of production, they realized

that the crop responded well to the Coastal Plain soils. Thus tobacco production moved into Wilson County, bringing new men and a new culture.

Nineteenth century tobacco production evolved from commercial production of the leaf in the English colonies. The Jamestown settlement developed a desirable crop when John Rolfe imported seed from Trinidad to improve the quality of locally grown Virginia tobacco. By 1622 Virginia tobacco was an important export crop on the world market, with prices far surpassing those of corn. When cured, the dark leaf became the money crop of Chesapeake plantations in Virginia and Maryland by the end of the seventeenth century. Encouraged by sales, planters continued to experiment with production techniques to satisfy consumer demands for taste and smell.[1]

Colonial planters in Virginia and Maryland were aware that soil types affected the tobacco quality, and therefore they developed the practice of planting tobacco on "new ground" to achieve desired results. By the end of the eighteenth century, as suitable land decreased in the Tidewater areas, tobacco production moved westward into the Piedmont regions of Virginia as well as backcountry North Carolina and Georgia. At the beginning of the

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[1] Nannie May Tilley, The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 1860-1929 (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1948), 4; Jerome E. Brooks, The Mighty Leaf (Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1952), 41, 48-49, 57, 150; Gray, History of Agriculture, 241.

nineteenth century farmers were growing tobacco commercially in the North Carolina counties of Caswell, Granville, Person, Rockingham, and Warren. These producers were near the North Carolina-Virginia border and could utilize southern Virginia markets.[2]

Additional North Carolina counties adopted cultivation of the leaf in the 1850s with Stokes to the west, Alamance, Forsyth, and Guildford in the central Piedmont, and Halifax and Franklin in the eastern Piedmont. These counties on Carolina's northern border became the Old Belt, a region known in the last half of the nineteenth century for its commercial tobacco production.[3]

Successes and failures of tobacco in the Old Belt were often dependent on the soil. The desire for suitable land to grow the quality of tobacco demanded by foreign markets continued to dictate where planters could produce the crop commercially. As with most crops, planters had always tried to cultivate tobacco on their most fertile soils. The result was a dark, coarse leaf similar to that grown in early Jamestown. Even in the eighteenth century

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[2] Ibid., 217, 233, 605-7, 773; Allan Kulikoff, Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Culture in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800 (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986), 122; T. H. Breen, Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Planters on the Eve of the Revolution (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 160-61; Cathy, Agricultural Developments, 120.

[3] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 11.

it became obvious that a milder, brighter, and lighter tobacco could be grown on land considered to be less fertile. In reality, soil which starved the crop of nutrients produced leaf qualities attractive to both buyers and consumers, providing better taste and smell as well as a brighter color, all evident when cured.[4]

Although Maryland, Ohio, and Kentucky grew bright tobacco by 1850, none could compete with North Carolina's production. Farmers in Piedmont North Carolina were able to produce large quantities of bright leaf even though only a third of the area had suitable tobacco lands due to the rolling landscape and lack of soil uniformity. Piedmont planters tended to increase the shortage of tobacco land by planting only their most fertile soils in the crop, avoiding the gray sandy lands which later would be found to be the best for bright leaf production.[5]

Tobacco planters had always been interested in methods to dry or cure the leaf successfully and efficiently since early experimentation in Jamestown. Nineteenth century planters of the Old Belt had used wood fires rather than air drying to complete the process. These farmers cut the whole tobacco stalks, then split and speared six to eight stalks on specially-fashioned "tobacco sticks." After hauling the tobacco from the

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[4] Ibid., 4, 6.

[5] Ibid., 13-16.

field, farmers hung the sticks on poles running across the barn from top to bottom. The curing process began soon after filling the barn, heating the leaf until dried with wood fires on the barn floor.[6]

Planters did much experimentation with the tobacco crop on individual farms, not all intentionally. Such was the case in 1839 when a Caswell County slave on the Abisha Slade plantation cured a barn of bright yellow tobacco by accident. One of Slade's slaves, eighteen year-old Stephen, fell asleep on a rainy night at the curing barn and ran out of dry wood to finish curing the leaf. In an anxious moment, he threw some charred wood on the fire, causing a sudden burst of heat in the barn, but producing yellow tobacco leaves, brighter than ordinary. The quality and color of this attractive leaf brought a top price when sold and resulted in new curing techniques for bright tobacco producers.[7]

Using knowledge gleaned from Stephen's accident, Abisha Slade perfected an easily duplicated curing recipe for other tobacco planters. Slade's curing methods required a "perfectly close" barn, tobacco grown on "fresh

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[6] Ibid., 5, 18, 57-59; Jordan Goodman, Tobacco in History; the Cultures of Dependence (London, Routeledge, Inc., 1993), 171-72.

[7] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 22-25; Cathy, Agricultural Developments, 125; Powell, Through Four Centuries, 310-11; S. Huntington Hobbs, Jr., North Carolina: An Economic and Social Profile (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1958), 108.

land, gray or sandy," curing with charcoal soon after cutting, and a thermometer to regulate the heat from 90-120 degrees over a seventy-two hour period. Despite various instructional changes over the years, Slade's requirements became standard features for bright tobacco curing.[8]

As Abisha Slade spread his curing recipe, planters recognized that curing techniques and soil types were key ingredients in the production of bright tobacco. With more emphasis on choices of color and texture, planters sought specific soil types for tobacco planting. In eastern areas of the Old Belt, light textured soil with a gray color more than doubled in price by 1857.[9]

The Slade curing formula merged with new curing equipment to brighten the bright leaf and complement the benefits of the Piedmont soil. By the 1820s Virginia and Maryland planters had experimented with tobacco curing using flues. Attempting to improve tobacco quality, planters discovered that an efficient curing system of flues protected the leaf as well as the curer from fire and smoke. The flue system enabled farmers to fuel furnaces through a furnace opening outside the barn.

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[8] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 25-32, 646-47.

[9] Richard B. Tennant, The American Cigarette Industry: A Study in Economic Analysis and Public Policy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950, 1971), 177; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 33.

Inside the barn flues circulated heat and smoke before venting it to the outside. With increased flue curing, the bright leaf also became known as flue-cured tobacco.[10]

The years after the Civil War brought increased improvements in the technology of tobacco curing in the Old Belt. By the 1880s reduced production costs of metal tobacco flues made them affordable to most farmers. With the flue-cured system farmers used wood to fuel barn furnaces, ending the labor intensive process of preparing charcoal.[11]

During the 1870s farmers began "priming," or breaking the separate leaves from the stalk. The new harvest method reduced the amount of fuel needed to cure a barn of tobacco. Without the stalk to hold the leaves on tobacco sticks, farmers devised other methods. By 1889 most farm workers tied binding twine to one end of the tobacco stick, then looped the twine around a handful of tobacco. Looping another bundle on the other side of the stick, the tobacco "stringer" moved down the stick back and forth until tying off a short distance from the end. This "looping" or "stringing" technique remained popular until

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[10] Ibid., 9, 18-22, 62-70; Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 176.

[11] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 62-63, 69.

the decline of stick barns in the 1980s.[12]

New developments in bright tobacco marketing paralleled the successes of leaf production in Carolina farm fields. Manufacturers bought much of the early nineteenth century tobacco directly from Old Belt planters as loose leaf or packed in hogsheads. The auction system for selling loose leaf tobacco developed from tobacco sales on the streets of Danville, Virginia, moving into an indoor warehouse by 1858. In 1871 the town of Durham held the first North Carolina tobacco auction sale, and by the 1880s auction warehouses were scattered all over the Old Belt. In 1884 Henderson, North Carolina, on the eastern end of the Old Belt, had four sales warehouses as well as a stemmery of the Allen and Ginter Tobacco Company.[13]

Both production and marketing of the bright leaf depended on tobacco manufacturing in North Carolina. Peddlers from Durham sold both plug and smoking tobacco to students at The University of North Carolina before the Civil War. Later the taste and smell of Durham tobacco also pleased both Confederate and Union soldiers in the area during the war. After returning home they wrote back for more. Realizing the potential for further sales, John Ruffin Green and W. T. Blackwell joined forces to produce smoking tobacco under the "Bull Durham" brand. Another

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[12] Ibid., 76-79.

[13] Ibid., 198-99, 207-12.

Durham tobacco manufacturer, Washington Duke also had achieved marketing success in cooperation with his sons in the post-war years. Competition between these two manufacturers of smoking tobacco in 1881 pushed the Dukes to the production of a new product, the cigarette.[14]

Bright tobacco benefitted most by the changing manufacturing markets and consumer demands. Top quality bright tobacco was used for fancy wrappers to cover plugs, while that of less quality was used in smoking tobacco. But it was the production of cigarettes that created an increasing demand for bright tobacco. Utilizing mass production techniques and an aggressive advertising campaign, the Dukes created a competitive market for cigarettes. By 1889 Washington Duke's son, James Buchanan Duke, successfully undercut rivals and created the American Tobacco Company, a monopoly of the five leading cigarette companies in the United States.[15]

While bright tobacco production appeared promising to Piedmont North Carolina farmers, the steady decline of cotton prices began to hurt the agricultural economy of the Coastal Plain. World competition and a decline in market demand eroded cotton prices steadily after 1866, but planters maintained memories of better times and hoped

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[14] Ibid., 305, 548-57; Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 22; Hobbs, Economic and Social Profile, 109.

[15] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 358, 568-577; Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 22-23.

to recapture them with increased production. By the late 1870s declining prices dropped further: cotton prices of forty-three cents per pound in 1866 were less than ten cents per pound in 1876. Cotton growers unsuccessfully sought to regain lost markets as the price slide continued downward to eight to nine cents per pound during the 1880s.[16]

During the decade of the 1880s declining cotton prices began to create economic pessimism among both urban and rural leaders in Wilson County. Seeking solutions, local news editors first resorted to the New South dialogue credited to Henry Grady of the Atlanta Constitution. Grady's vision for the South stressed a economically self-sufficient region composed of both industrialization and an altered agriculture system, a "marriage of the mill and the cotton field." But Grady also desired expansion beyond that of a single money crop to more diversified agriculture.[17]

In an effort to counterbalance lower cotton prices from 1860-1890, Wilson County farmers increased cotton acreage while reducing corn and small grains. Since the

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[16] Brandfon, Cotton Kingdom, 117; Wright, Political Economy, 90-96, 158-59; Paul D. Escott, Many Excellent People (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1985), 174; Fite, Cotton Field, 6-7; Newby, Plain Folk, 29-30.

[17] Brandfon, Cotton Kingdom, 16; Escott, Many Excellent People, 172-74; Paul M. Gaston, The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1970), 65-67.

declining crops were generally for home use, area farmers had to purchase food and feed formally produced on the farm. The changing structures of agricultural operations in the county created less emphasis on self-sufficiency. During the thirty-year time period, the county farming operations declined in size and increasingly became tenant operated. The decline of the self-sufficient plantation and yeoman farm evolved along with the end to slave labor. Increasingly agriculture became commercialized. Tenants, whether cash or share, were concerned with producing enough income to pay the rent or share. Pressed with decisions to plant for home use or for sale, most tenants chose the latter.[18]

In 1887 the editor of The Wilson Mirror recognized the problem of over-production of cotton and under-production of foodstuffs when he printed an article from a Wayne County paper calling for farmers to " raise your own supplies, cease to mortgage, plant grain of all sorts, raise cattle, raise hogs and put your surplus land and time in cotton." Attempting to stimulate planter desire for diversification, the writer accused farmers of being "slaves of cotton." The promotion of self-sufficiency was not new and would last for years to come in the twentieth century in various forms. While the efforts had

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[18] Eighth Census, 109, 210; Ninth Census, 220, 360; Tenth Census, 721, 803; Eleventh Census, 170, 396.

merit, as agriculture and life in general became more commercialized, self-sufficiency declined in both urban and rural lives.[19]

Aside from rural self-sufficiency, regional self-sufficiency was another aspect of the New South promotion. Grady desired to reduce the South's reliance on imported products. His well-known story of 1886 illustrated the colonialism of the South, relating the story of the funeral of a Georgia farmer who was buried in a Cincinnati casket, and a Vermont tombstone: "The South didn't furnish a thing on earth for that funeral but the corpse and the hole in the ground." The general premise of Grady's story was that the South should create manufacturing and industry to accommodate southern agricultural products and provide diversified jobs for the area. Grady's story reflected the stresses of the times: agricultural products were bringing lower prices, and the South seemed to have been left behind as the industrial and manufacturing North surged ahead after the war.[20]

Long before New South promoters pushed cotton mill construction, a Coastal Plain cotton factory began operations in Edgecombe County. In a "revolution from

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[19] The Wilson Mirror, Nov. 9, 1887.

[20] The Wilson Advance, Jan, 23, 1890; Gaston, New South Creed, 47, 54; James C. Cobb, Industrialization and Southern Society,1877-1984 (Lexington: The Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1984), 10.

above" textile investment and leadership was often initiated by planters seeking financial diversification. As early as 1818 planter Joel Battle of Edgecombe County began a mill in the Nash County town of Rocky Mount. In adjoining Wilson County, the textile mill promotion began in 1881 with the formation of the Wilson Cotton Mills. James E. Clark, called "the prime mover of the factory" obtained financial pledges to begin development. In the capacity as Secretary and Treasurer of the new company, Clark traveled to northern states to look at mill designs. Five prominent Wilson businessmen became directors of the new mill: T. J. Hadley, M. Rountree, T. J. Gardner, A. J. Hines, and H. G. Whitehead. By 1895 the mill had seven thousand spindles consuming 1,150,000 pounds of cotton a year.[21]

Wilson County cotton mill investors resembled the Battles of Rocky Mount. At least three of the directors of the Wilson Cotton Mill represented old planter families in the county. Thomas J. Hadley, born in 1838 to a planter family around Contentnea Creek, served in the Confederate Army, graduated from the University of North Carolina, and became a lawyer in Wilson. By the 1880s

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[21] Billings, Planters, 58, 82-84, 65-69, 91-92, 217; History of Edgecombe, 344; Nash County Notes, 214; The Wilson Advance, Jan. 6, 13, 20, 1882; Cobb, Industrialization, 21; N.C. Bureau of Labor, Ninth Annual Report: 1895 (Winston, N.C.: M. I. & J. C. Stewart, Public Printers and Binders, 1895), 52-53.

Hadley was associated with Alpheus Branch in a mercantile business. His brother-in-law was Dr. Stephen Woodard, a large slaveowner and planter of Saratoga Township in 1860. Moses Rountree also came from a planter family in the area. Born in 1822, he farmed and ran a mercantile business with his brother after 1846. Although the family farm was close to the town of Wilson, Rountree lived within the city limits and was involved in town politics and education. His sister-in-law was Martha Hadley, Thomas Hadley's sister. Howell Gray Whitehead also was a local planter and businessman. He married the only sister of Frank Barnes, another large planter and bank president. Whitehead lived only until 1887, but his son carried on his agricultural interests. As in other cases in North Carolina, these postbellum Wilson planters diversified their economic activities, often investing in varied financial opportunities when cotton prices declined.[22]

The textile industry in Wilson was one form of New South diversification, but planters did not continue to promote cotton mills in eastern North Carolina. Coastal Plain soil offered more agricultural opportunities than the red soils of the Piedmont, and planters had deeper economic ties to agriculture. To develop an extensive textile industry required a large landless work force, and

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[22] Gold, "Town Named Wilson," 29-32, 34-35, 57-58, 127, 134; Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 161, 164; Billings, Planters, 101-102.

planters were not interested in losing farm labor. With declining cotton prices in the 1880s, planters sought alternative crops. Rather than replicate the textile industry of Piedmont North Carolina, planters looked to the bright tobacco culture. In the Coastal Plain the New South promotion for economic diversity could be met in the production, marketing, and processing of tobacco.[23]

As producers realized that light sandy land produced desirable cigarette tobacco, farmers brought bright tobacco production eastward into the Coastal Plain where gray soil was abundant. In the late 1870s farmers seeking crop alternatives to buffer low cotton prices experimented with plantings of bright tobacco in Craven and Wayne counties. By 1884 farmers in Warren, Franklin, and Nash were also seriously producing the crop but found difficulty in reaching marketing facilities. Tobacco auction warehouses at Henderson and Oxford in the eastern edge of the Old Belt were the closest markets for Coastal Plain farmers. In 1884 an auction market opened in a tent in the Nash County town of Battleboro, but a windstorm ended this temporary facility before the end of the selling season.[24]

In the New South spirit of boosterism, town leaders

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[23] Gaston, New South Creed, 78.

[24] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 142-43, 212; The Wilson Mirror, July 30; Aug. 27, 1890; Ricks, Nash County Notes, 216.

and local newspaper editors promoted the production of bright tobacco to economically depressed cotton farmers. One of the best-known New South promoters in eastern North Carolina, Josephus Daniels grew up in the town of Wilson during the 1860-1880 period. Born in 1862 Daniels was a postbellum child of ordinary means. His family had arrived in the town of Wilson during the Civil War after the death of his father. In need of income, his mother became postmistress, and Josephus and his brothers worked at odd jobs. At age eighteen, Daniels became editor of the Wilson Advance. By the 1890s he had acquired a Raleigh newspaper from friend Walter Hines Page, then went on to establish the News and Observer with financial backing from tobacconist Julian Carr. Throughout his years with the paper, Daniels became the spokesman for eastern North Carolina tobacco interests. Active in the state and national Democratic party, Daniels became Secretary of the Navy in 1913 and U. S. Ambassador to Mexico in 1933.[25]

Both Daniels and his brother who succeeded him at The Wilson Advance began promoting the benefits of tobacco production. They were also joined by Henry Blount, the editor of the competing Wilson Mirror. Using a promotional technique of Henry Grady in the Atlanta

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[25] Gaston, New South Creed, 48-53; Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 9-11,92-98, 520-22; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 271-75.

Constitution, Wilson County editors sought producers of bright tobacco in Old Belt and Coastal Plain counties who were willing to write instructive articles to encourage prospective planters of Wilson to plant tobacco. R. H. Ricks, a well-known tobacco pioneer in Nash County in the 1880s who became president of the Rocky Mount Cotton Mill by the 1890s, advised Wilson area farmers on the benefits of tobacco production. In a January 1885 article, Ricks assumed the role of a New South promoter, stressing beliefs in crop diversity and the yeoman farmer: "I consider the cultivation of tobacco belongs almost entirely to small white farmers who do their own work themselves with the aid of their families." His comments indicated an aversion to tenancy found on larger farm holdings, but in spite of his own advice, he planted a seventy-five acre tobacco crop in 1890 with tenant help.[26]

Ricks was not alone in cautioning against excessive tobacco planting. Josephus Daniels also advised Wilson farmers not to rely on tobacco. It was hard to contain his enthusiasm for a crop he said would make one-third more profit per acre than cotton, but Daniels still wanted farmers to remain diversified and produce both: "Cotton and tobacco together can make us rich. Tobacco

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[26] Gaston, New South Creed, 64-65, 112; The Wilson Advance, Jan. 15, 1885; Feb. 20, 1890; The Wilson Mirror, Feb. 26, 1990.

alone has made Durham and Winston cities." Daniels feared that Wilson's cotton farmers would be hesitant to cultivate tobacco due to lack of experience with the new crop: "The greatest thing in the way the Advance can see is the lack of knowledge on the part of the farmer." Yet there was little for Daniels to worry about; the learning process was already underway.[27]

The Coastal Plain was already an open frontier for tobacco expansion, with or without New South boosters. The gray soil and a depressed cotton market offered many incentives for those willing to invest the time and money in the bright tobacco culture. By the decade of the 1880s a number of Wilson County farmers followed the advice of Ricks and began planting tobacco. In 1880 farmers planted only seventeen acres yielding 8,745 pounds, still a large expansion from the 1860 production of 312 pounds. By 1890 farmers grew 483 acres, producing 232,966 pounds.[28]

Most of the early Wilson tobacco planters were similar to Ricks of Nash County; they were already established planters and businessmen seeking new opportunities for investment. In the Wilson Township Calvin Barnes was one of these early tobacco planters with land and political title. By 1872 Barnes owned 333 acres,

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[27] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 152; The Wilson Advance, Jan. 9, 1885.

[28] Daniels, Tar Heel, Editor, 151; Eighth Census, 109; Tenth Census, 803; Eleventh Census, 445.

and the same year he became a county justice of the peace. During the decade of the 1880s Barnes expanded his tobacco production and became an example for local growers. With no local market available, Barnes used the Henderson market to sell his crop. Evidently successful, he received a February 1890 check totaling $2,712.23 for part of his 1889 crop. Like Ricks, Barnes did not restrict his acreage. Local editors described his 1890 crop as "forest like fields of tobacco."[29]

Tobacco production offered other large planter-businessmen opportunities to invest their land and capital in the new crop. Tobacco grower Frank Barnes was a wealthy cotton planter and the president of the First National Bank in Wilson in the 1880s. Moses Rountree's son James also planted early bright tobacco crops. Howell Gray Whitehead had both farming and textile interests while he produced tobacco. Kichen Watson owned prime farmland in Wilson County where he pioneered tobacco production. Watson promoted new cultivation and curing practices in "Watson's Tobacco Letters" published in the Wilson Times in the 1890s, later compiled in the Tobacco

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[29] Branson's Business Directory, 1872; H. B. Johnston, ed., "Business Directories of Wilson County," 1976, Wilson County Public Library, Wilson, N.C., 368; The Wilson Mirror, Feb. 26; July 23, 1890.

Almanac in 1897.[30]

All early bright tobacco growers were not native to the area. The potential for better soil and growing conditions brought new planters to the Coastal Plain. Fielding Knott of Granville County in the Old Belt acquired six hundred acres in Nash County in 1888, paying for the farm with a surplus the first year. Captain Jack H. Finch had grown tobacco in Vance County before moving to Wilson to plant the crop. His farming provided a model to local growers seeking information on the bright leaf. In 1890 Finch expected to receive four thousand dollars from his crop of tobacco.[31]

The early tobacco producers of the 1880s spread their successes among other Coastal Plain growers. The Wilson Mirror reported that by 1890 other areas of Eastern Carolina shared Wilson's enthusiasm for a tobacco economy:

> The ably edited Wilmington Star says: "The Wilson Mirror states that there are within a radius of five miles of Wilson six hundred tobacco barns. This is proof of the progress that tobacco-culture has made in that county within the short period since its cultivation was entered upon. Its culture has also increased rapidly in Edgecombe, Nash, Pitt, Pender, Halifax, and other Eastern counties, and if the culture continues to increase at the present rate it will not be many years before tobacco growing will be one of the

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[30] William B. Clark, Jr., "Some Reflections on and Trivia of Wilson's Tobacco Auction Warehouses, 1890-1980," 1991, Wilson County Public Library, Wilson, N.C., 719, 781-83; Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 158; Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 14, 161; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 147.

[31] Ricks, Nash County Notes, 216; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 146; The Wilson Advance, Jan. 2, 1890.

> leading industries of the farm in these and other Eastern counties. It has passed the experimental stage and is now an established and recognized success, the yield being greater per acre and the quality of leaf as fine as can be raised in any portion of the tobacco-growing territory. In some respects this section has marked advantages over the famous Piedmont belt, which until recently was regarded as pre-eminently the field for the growth of fine tobacco. The planting season coming on earlier in the east the crop escapes the danger of early frosts which it has always to fear in the uplands, and which is one of the great obstacles that the tobacco grower has to encounter. The crop is now so well grown in Wilson and other counties in this section that it stands from two to three feet high, and some of the planters are beginning to cut and cure, while in portions of the uplands some of the planters have scarcely got through planting. Give the tobacco growers of the east good home markets, which will secure them good prices, and tobacco growing will become a great industry.[32]

Wilson tobacco planter L. F. Lucas began the promotion of a tobacco warehouse in a December 1889 letter to The Advance. Other writers promoted a Wilson market, and by the end of January a group of planters and businessmen began organizing. Led by tobacco planter Calvin Barnes, local planter-businessmen pledged five thousand dollars and incorporated the Wilson Tobacco Warehouse Company. Elected officers of the new company represented "the most influential and the wealthiest men in Wilson county," a combination of both planters and local businessmen. Investors made plans to build a brick warehouse of 80 by 160 feet to be completed by early summer. Interest in the effort was sufficient to raise

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[32] The Wilson Mirror, June 11, 1890.

$50,000 by March 1890 for the warehouse construction.[33]

The new tobacco company soon hired Captain E. M. Pace as the 1890 warehouse manager. Pace represented Old Belt tobacco planters and warehousemen who saw opportunities in Coastal Plain Carolina. He came to Rocky Mount in 1889 to work on the new market there and began a series of moves throughout the Carolinas to organize markets and promote the bright tobacco culture. Pace carried an outstanding reputation as a tobacco promoter. R. L. Ragland, an Old Belt tobacco seed producer, highly recommended Pace: "If his services can be procured he will 'make things hum' all over Wilson county, and help you to build a paying industry in your midst." Pace was not a disappointment. He distributed fliers to farmers with instructions on soil types, planting times, worming, and curing. In order to attract business for the new market, he visited local tobacco producers to advise them as their crop developed. After the market opened in September 1890, Pace utilized his "Leaf Tobacco" articles to continue his instruction and promotion. No novice to promotional efforts, Pace spiced his technical writings in The Wilson Advance with human interest notes on the social happenings of Wilson

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[33] The Wilson Advance, Jan. 2, 23, 30; Feb. 6, 1890; The Wilson Mirror, Jan. 29; Mar. 5, 1890; Clark, "Reflections," 719-20.

tobacconists to widen his appeal to a variety of readers.[34]

By September 1890 the Wilson Warehouse was ready for sales. Investors had changed construction plans over the months and built the building of wood, 100 by 150 feet. Pace advertised the Wilson Tobacco Warehouse's first sale on September 10, 1890, by emphasizing reduced warehouse charges and grower convenience. For area farmers who had been shipping their tobacco crop by rail to distant markets, the Wilson market offered the opportunity to see their tobacco sold and receive prompt payment. Warehouse sales began at eleven o'clock daily except Sundays. When Pace tallied sales figures for the first day, he announced that 42,717 pounds of tobacco had sold for $8,637.34. James Simms Woodard sold the first pile of tobacco on the Wilson market. Woodard, who was related to warehouse directors Walter F., David W., and James E. Woodard, received an average of fifty cents a pound, although the Wilson market average for the year was barely over ten cents.[35]

The businessmen of Wilson maintained high hopes for

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[34] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 125-32, 146, 216; The Wilson Advance, Jan. 30, 1890; Mar. 2, 1993; E. M. Pace, "Tobacco," 1890, Wilson County Public Library, Wilson, N.C.

[35] Clark, "Reflections," 721-24; The Wilson Mirror, Sept. 10, 1890; Hugh Buckner Johnston, "Bits of Wilson History," vol. 1, 1979, Wilson County Public Library, Wilson N.C.

economic benefits from tobacco production, marketing, and processing. Boosters compared Wilson's future to that of Old Belt towns, Winston-Salem and Durham, which grew and diversified with tobacco markets and factories. In 1890 the town officials offered incentives for tobacco-related development by providing "lots free to all who wish to build prize houses and warehouses for the next five years." The editors of The Wilson Mirror joined the promotion in an 1890 article entitled "What Wilson Needs:"

> It needs more manufacturing enterprises. We have the material, we have the money and an abundance of labor. The cotton made in Wilson and surrounding counties ought to be spun and woven too in our own mills; our wool made into cloth and blankets; our tobacco manufactured into plug and smoking tobacco; our machine shops might be increased in capacity and efficiency and employment given to many more people and profits saved. Hackney Brothers with their immense carriage factory, are employing a large number of hands besides an immense engine to run the machinery. Paschall Brothers are worked to the utmost capacity in making and mending machinery. The foundry is casting ploughs and doing other needed work and busy all the time. Calvin Barnes with his numerous enterprises in tobacco and lumber, John T. Barnes with his planing machines, sash and door factory are all doing well; but the business ought to be extended; more capital put in; more hands employed; then the crop failures would not be so disastrous.[36]

For boosters the new tobacco market was not enough to create a New South economy in Wilson County. The community needed tobacco processing and manufacturing to achieve the results they envisioned. Editors of The Wilson Mirror were enthusiastic for this further step

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[36] The Wilson Advance, Jan. 9, 1885; Feb. 6, 1890; The Wilson Mirror, Jan. 22, 1890.

toward a tobacco economy: "Now for the factories. Bestir yourselves, men of Wilson, and don't let the ball quit moving." The editors referred to manufacturing and processing plants similar to those found in Winston-Salem and Durham.[37]

By 1889 a plug tobacco factory operated in Wilson, and by 1895 another factory produced smoking tobacco, cigars, and cheroots. But these plants were similar to the small antebellum tobacco factories which processed and manufactured chewing and pipe tobacco. The latter operation employed only a few workers: nine men, four women, and one child. Wilson businessmen envisioned a tobacco industry employing many more people and representing the New South cigarette industry.[38]

With the formation of the new Wilson Warehouse, buyers needed processing facilities for the purchased leaf. In order to preserve the cured tobacco for long periods, purchasers had to redry the leaf, then pack it for aging and transport to manufacturers. Buyers performed both these processing stages in tobacco prizeries. In the 1890s local investors operated a number of prizeries in Wilson. Requiring little equipment, most operations employed limited numbers of workers. Planter-

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[37] Ibid., Sept. 17, 1890.

[38] Branson's Business Directory 1890, 706; Ninth Annual Report: 1895, 306-8.

businessmen probably built one of the first prize houses along with the Wilson Warehouse, but independent leaf dealers developed other local prizeries.[39]

Charles Mortimer Fleming represented the Briggs, Branch, Fleming Tobacco Company when he purchased the first tobacco from James Simms Woodard in 1890. His company was a locally-owned tobacco prizery which Fleming and other investors organized in Wilson around 1890. Fleming gained the title of "Grandfather of Wilson's Tobacco Market" for his initial purchase and subsequent promotion and work on the market for many years after. The Fleming enterprise was representative of many other small independent prizeries located in Wilson during the 1890s.[40]

Large tobacco manufacturing companies sometimes bought leaf from local prizeries, but they often utilized their own redrying plants. These facilities were sophisticated enterprises involving machinery and a large labor force. During the first decade of the Wilson market, the American Tobacco Company, better known as "the Trust," leased the old Wilson Prizery building from new owners and converted it to a modern redrying facility.[41]

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[39] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 310; Clark, "Reflections," n.p.

[40] Ibid., 725-26.

[41] Ibid., 23.

With the development of a new agricultural crop, some early time-merchants were reluctant to endorse tobacco experimentation by financially burdened farmers. Cotton had been the crop of choice for years for lenders and merchants who felt comfortable with it as collateral. Initially some lenders were reluctant to provide credit for tobacco production. Textile investor and time-merchant Thomas Hadley referred to tobacco as "a gamblers' crop" and viewed cotton as "a crop you can depend on." In spite of Hadley's sentiments, by 1890 the businessmen of Wilson were determined to make a success of tobacco. By the September 10, 1890 opening of the Wilson Tobacco Warehouse, the "wide awake and liberal and generous merchants" of Wilson provided an Eastern North Carolina tradition, "barbecue and the trimmings."[42]

Wilson merchants and traveling equipment manufacturers soon recognized that the new crop offered additional economic opportunities. By 1890 local merchants began stocking tobacco fertilizers in addition to their cotton specialties. The same year various equipment used in tobacco production became available to the Wilson farmers. An 1890 advertisement for the Snow tobacco sticks, an early answer to the curing of individual leaves, offered favorable testimonials from

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[42] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 151; The Wilson Mirror, Sept. 3, 1890.

Black Creek and Lucama tobacco growers. Entrepreneur Robert L. Wyatt supplied further curing needs with the local production of tobacco flues.[43]

Traveling equipment manufacturers also began to frequent Wilson to peddle their tobacco machinery. F. A. Bemis of Madison, Wisconsin, demonstrated his mechanical tobacco transplanter in the presence of Ed. M. Pace in March of 1890, not long before transplanting season. Bemis stressed the convenience of the transplanter, requiring only two youths to sit on the machine and drop plants while a driver controlled the team. A water barrel on the transplanter release enough moisture for each plant. The Bemis transplanter became a favorite of local farmers until the decline of horse drawn machinery in the twentieth century.[44]

By 1890 Wilson County farmers and businessmen were enthusiastic about local attempts at New South diversification. Farmers had a new crop offering higher prices per acre than cotton, and the market system was underway, supported by the tobacco factories which processed and redried the leaf. Although these businesses were in their infancy, there were signs of expansion in all three aspects of the tobacco culture: cultivation,

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[43] Ibid., June 18, 1890; The Wilson Advance, Jan. 2, 1890.

[44] Ibid., May 1, 1890.

marketing, and processing.

By 1900 Wilson County farmers cultivated 9,465 acres of tobacco, increased from 483 acres produced in 1890. With low cotton prices, tobacco was an attractive addition to their farming income. The successes of the crop increased sales on the local market. The 1,508 pounds sold on the Wilson Market in 1890 climbed to 18,078 in 1899. Investors built a total of six warehouses during the decade. Local investors owned the sixteen prizeries in Wilson, and the American Tobacco Company ran the one redrying plant. Wilson businessmen still hoped for tobacco manufacturing plants, but the domination of the Tobacco Trust limited that goal. Small tobacco manufacturing companies of the 1890s had little chance of competing as long as the American Tobacco Company continued to undercut prices.[45]

Tobacco became Wilson's New South opportunity for economic diversity. Considering the county's agricultural background of cotton and corn production, the move to tobacco planting was not a difficult transition. Old Belt farmers developed the bright tobacco technology, and consumer demand for the cigarette insured a market.

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[45] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census: 1900 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902, 566; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 347, 554-55, 593-600; Clark, "Reflections," 16-17; William Boyd Clark, Jr., "Tobacco Processing Plants of the Wilson Tobacco Market Since 1890," 1986, Wilson County Public Library, Wilson, N.C., 2-27; Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 28-29.

Discouraged by poor cotton prices, farmers had an economic incentive to seek out alternative crops. The large planters, those most able to experiment and invest, pioneered the Wilson County efforts in tobacco production and marketing. Most of these planters were already diversified in their business efforts and sought additional agricultural income. They had much to gain through investments in tobacco production, marketing, and processing, and their other business interests in merchandising and banking also stood to benefit. By 1890 newspaper editors and urban leaders envisioned the town of Wilson as another Durham or Winston-Salem with tobacco factories surrounded by small tobacco farms.

Wilson County leaders felt that a New South economy was well-established by the end of the century. Crop diversification in the Coastal Plain offered another step beyond that of Piedmont cotton fields and mills. While Wilson maintained its cotton culture, it was expanding into another agricultural crop with its many appendages, marketing and processing. The tobacco culture was also a comfortable arrangement, preserving Old South traditions. Cotton farmers in Wilson already possessed land, equipment, and a labor system which would fit into tobacco cultivation. With proper management, the two crops complemented each other and maintained the tenant labor system for years to come. After all, tobacco was not

really new to the South. It had long been a part of colonial and antebellum agriculture and labor. It too could create its own traditions in Wilson County.

CHAPTER 3

TOBACCO FARMERS: 1880-1940

The introduction of flue-cured tobacco into the agricultural economy of Wilson County required new cultural practices for many landowners and tenants who grew the new crop. Tobacco production on thousands of farms within the county created a culture of hard work and community support. Tobacco farmers learned new skills as they balanced the production of both cotton and tobacco. For the most part, farmers withstood the difficulties in crop production because they felt that the diversity provided buffers to low prices. In spite of differences in work patterns and necessary skills, tobacco cultivation was so closely aligned with cotton that it made few changes in labor arrangements. Thus tobacco became another tenant crop with an economic ladder similar to that of cotton. For many tenants the tobacco culture was a continuation of the cotton culture, altering the agricultural economy and society in Wilson County very little.

The addition of tobacco to Wilson County farms in the 1880s did create changes in agricultural skills and work schedules. Cotton and corn production left county farmers a few winter months free from pressing farm work. By including an additional crop of tobacco, Wilson farmers

greatly increased their labor requirements throughout the year. Tobacco farmers often described the time constraints of the crop by saying, "It takes thirteen months a year to grow tobacco." Once established, tobacco production changed little from 1900 to 1940, the years before tractor mechanization.[1]

Tobacco growers had learned even in the colonial period to start their plants in a seed bed in winter months in order to be able to produce a mature crop between the last frost of spring and the first frost of fall. Wilson County sharecropper John Easton described the plant bed preparation in the 1930s:

> Did you know that the best tobacco plants air raised on new ground land? They air, and the land's got to be burnt over for the best results. I really fix it in the wintertime, that is, I clear the land and burn the brush in December or January. I plow the land deep with a two-horse plow along about the first of February, rake out the roots and grass and plant the seed thick. I roll logs up to each side of the bed and pull the canvas tight across it.[2]

Easton's procedure followed farming practices unchanged since the nineteenth century. The use of new ground and the brush burning reduced the grass and weed seeds and helped to insure fertility. In the twentieth century farmers began to use land already cleared for beds

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[1] Daniels, Tar Heels, 84.

[2] Federal Writers' Project Works Progress Administration, These Are Our Lives (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1939), 11.

and avoided the labor needed to prepare new ground. Most farmers also applied either manure or commercial fertilizer to further enrich the land before carefully broadcasting the tiny tobacco seeds across the bed. The use of tobacco canvas, a cheesecloth to protect plants, was common by the 1880s when bright tobacco reached Wilson County. Usually bent reeds held up the cloth until the new plants grew large enough to support it. The tobacco plants did not emerge from the ground until about the first of March. From then until transplanting in May, farmers periodically thinned and weeded beds.[3]

On suitable work days in January and February farmers often cut wood needed to cure the tobacco during the harvest season. Needing approximately one cord of wood to cure each barn, a farmer with a small crop would need at least four cords to cure his crop. Usually male members of the farm family cut wood in the winter months, but farmers lacking sufficient help hired day labor from town to complete the job. Farm families also prepared their wood for heating and cooking while they sawed and mauled the curing fuel. Wilson County farmer E. L. Thigpen remembered hauling the wood by two-horse wagon loads and stacking it outside each tobacco barn to dry until curing

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[3] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 37-43; Joseph C. Robert, The Story of Tobacco in America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 119-28.

time.[4]

Before hauling all the barn wood, farmers were plowing fields in preparation for corn, cotton, and tobacco. The early practice of clearing new land to plant tobacco was short-lived in Wilson County. Farmers planted most tobacco in old fields after 1900. Improved land escalated from 66,027 acres in 1880 to 98,645 in 1890, but there was little change in cropland for the next fifty years. By 1939 farmers cultivated 99,108 acres in Wilson County.[5]

Land preparation was a continuation of procedures and skills typically found within the cotton culture. Farmers tended to plow the tobacco ground more carefully in order to cover exposed vegetation and provide a clean planting surface. The Jim Thigpen family had one of the first riding disks pulled by four mules in southeastern Wilson County. The size and weight of the large disk made further plowing easier and more efficient. After smoothing the surface, Thigpen "laid off" rows through the field, distributed fertilizer, and "threw up ridges." Time was a factor and there was little labor-saving equipment for many Wilson County farmers. To increase

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[4] Ibid., 166; Taylor, Sharecroppers, 48-50; E. L. Thigpen, taped interview by author, Dec. 7, 1995, Saratoga, N.C.

[5] Tenth Census, 721; Eleventh Census, 222; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census: 1940 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1942), 336.

labor productivity the family invested in a K. P. Guano Sower which put out the fertilizer and ridged the row in one trip. Farmers hoped to complete preparation for tobacco in March so they could finish planting corn and cotton in April.[6]

Most farmers targeted May tenth as the desirable date to transplant tobacco plants, but weather factors could easily alter schedules. Available family labor pulled plants from the dampened beds and carried them to the edge of the fields. Planting methods varied with the size of the crop and the farmer's equipment. Sharecropper John Easton again used techniques typical of the nineteenth century:

> We used good strong lightard pegs to stick the holes and one sets out about as fast as a feller can drop the plants. I want them about two and a half feet apart and I want the dirt packed tight to the roots. If it's real dry we water them with buckets and gourds.

By the 1930s many farmers used the Bemis Tobacco Transplanter, first introduced in Wilson County in the 1880s. Pulled by two horses, it was a combination of man power and machinery as it knocked dirt off the row, watered, and planted each tobacco plant. Regardless of equipment, transplanting was a labor intensive procedure. Most farm families walked their newly-transplanted fields

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[6] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 45-47; Thigpen interview; Anniversary Committee, History of Wilson County, 373-74.

within a few days and pegged in any missing hills.[7]

The farmer's tobacco work schedule merged with that of corn, cotton, and garden crops. Much of the farm equipment was interchangeable; a change of sweeps made a cotton plow into a tobacco plow. While farmers cultivated corn twice before laying-by, they plowed tobacco each week and hoed it at least twice. As in corn and cotton, farmers often threw out soda by hand, then plowed it toward the tobacco roots at lay-by. If on schedule, farmers finished cultivation of all three crops sometime in late June.[8]

In the cotton culture, Wilson farmers experienced less labor pressure by July, but tobacco required further work. Once the tobacco plant reached maturity, farmers had to "top" each plant to remove the flower head and divert the plant nourishment to the leaves. In bright tobacco, farmers topped high, leaving twelve to eighteen leaves for lighter weight. Farm families walked over their tobacco field and broke the tops by hand, dropping them to the ground. The procedure stimulated the plant growth of "suckers" in the leaf axils to replace the seed head; these too had to be broken out by hand, a job completed at weekly intervals until the harvest ended.

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[7] Tenth Census, 114; Federal Writers, These Are Our Lives, 12; Robert, Story of Tobacco, 129-39.

[8] Ibid., 139-40; Tenth Census, 709.

The major insects to attack the crop at its mature stage were tobacco horn worms. Farmers manually killed these insects while suckering.[9]

Most of the tobacco producer's July work came from the harvest and curing of the leaf. In the bright tobacco culture, the bottom leaves are the first to ripen and the first harvested. Starting with the bottom leaves, workers "primed" or "cropped" three leaves per stalk over the entire field. Once harvest began farm workers primed the tobacco weekly, each time removing two to four leaves. Croppers were soaking wet from the morning dew, then burned up from the sun the rest of the day. In spite of the heat, most workers preferred long sleeve-shirts to limit contact with the sticky tobacco gum. Croppers worked in a bent position to prime the bottom leaves, but each week they moved up the tobacco stalk and were gradually in a standing position by the last harvest.[10]

As the croppers filled their arms with leaves, they placed them on a sled or a "tobacco truck," a narrow wood wheeled vehicle pulled between the rows by a single mule. A well-trained mule would keep up with the croppers by voice commands and not require a driver until the end of the row. Then a driver turned both mule and truck in the next row or drove to the barn. Primers played the game of

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[9] Ibid.; Robert, Story of Tobacco, 140-44.

[10] Ibid., 151-153; Daniel, Breaking the Land, 28-29;

racing with the barn workers in order to gain rest time in the field and tried to "catch up" before another truck arrived. Usually a farmer had at least two tobacco trucks and two mules in order to keep both field and barn hands occupied.[11]

At the barn two workers "handed" leaves to the "looper" who tied them on to tobacco sticks. A designated worker removed the finished sticks, hanging them in a rack or "poking up" to someone hanging the sticks in the barn. Often farmers did not hang the barn until the day's harvest was over and all the laborers could help. In the 1930s farmers usually tried to fill one barn a day. Generic barns were sixteen to twenty-four feet square and held fro77m 400 to 700 sticks. Most barns had a looping shelter on the furnace end to provide protection from the weather for workers.[12]

The labor requirements of tobacco harvest consumed rural communities the month of July and at least part of August. Many farm families "swapped work" with each other, exchanging labor on one farm for labor on another. Often swapping was done within kinship networks, even extending to the town cousins who came to help during barning season. A large family was an asset on a tobacco

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[11] Taylor, Sharecroppers, 92-93.

[12] Ibid., 94; Daniel, Breaking the Land, 30; Robert, Story of Tobacco, 162-67.

farm due to extensive labor needs. Wives and children who worked in transplanting and hoeing were also needed during harvest, curing, and grading. Most farm wives juggled both farm and household work loads during harvest season. It was not uncommon for women to cook their breakfast and dinner before going to the looping shelter at dawn, then leaving shortly before the noon meal to warm the food. After feeding many of the hands and washing the dishes, they then return to work at the barn in the afternoon. Mothers placed infants on quilts while other children played and worked, all within sight of family members. Most farmers allowed a break-time in mid-morning and mid-afternoon when workers snacked on watermelons, and in later years, sent orders to the closest country store for drinks and moon pies. Work was serious, but always offered opportunities for conversation.[13]

Farmers began the curing process soon after filling the barn by placing a small fire in the brick furnace to "yellow" the tobacco at a temperature of ninety to a hundred degrees, but on a hot day no fire was needed until night. Farmers kept air circulation to a minimum in the barn during this stage by stuffing bricks in foundation vents and gradually advanced the temperature to 140

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[13] Thigpen interview; Taylor, Sharecroppers, 89-91; Anne R. Phillips, "Farm Women of Stokes County, North Carolina and the Production of Flue-Cured Tobacco, 1925-1955: Continuity and Change" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Maryland College Park, 1990), 68, 83; Daniel, Breaking the Land, 29-30;

degrees to dry the leaf. The "killing out" stage required heats of 170 degrees with open vents to circulate the air and dry the stems. Generally the curing process required four to six days of close attention, both day and night.[14]

Entire families took shifts at the barn during the night. Eventually three generations of the Thigpen family "sat up" with the barn when thirteen year-old E. L. Thigpen replaced his mother's four-hour morning shift. For farm couples without children the job was even more difficult. As a Wilson County farm wife without children, Estelle Flowers helped her husband cure their tobacco crops. Between fueling the furnace, she rested on a tobacco truck made into a temporary bed.[15]

Farmers checked the curing temperatures by a thermometer which hung inside the barn. Thigpen's grandfather placed a string on the thermometer to mark the necessary curing temperature for his young grandson, but Thigpen questions the need for precision: "They made out like it was real important that it not vary at all, that it stay right there, but there was a lot of times when it varied and evidently it turned pretty good." When curing was completed farmers left the barn doors open overnight

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[14] Ibid., 31; Robert, Story of Tobacco, 174-77.

[15] Thigpen interview; F. R. and Estelle Flowers, taped interview by author, April 20, 1995, Elm City, N.C.

to allow the cured leaf to absorb enough moisture so that it could be removed without crumbling. Pressed for curing space, often workers had to "take out" a barn before light in order to have room for that day's harvest.[16]

Farmers temporarily stored their cured leaf in packhouses until they could prepare it for sale. In the years between 1900-1940 markets did not open until September, so farmers who finished harvest in August may have had a few weeks to pull fodder or begin picking cotton before preparing tobacco for sale. John Easton described his methods of preparing tobacco for market:

> When the curing is done we start to grading. The younguns takes it off the sticks while two people put it in three or four grades. As many as wants to can tie it in bundles with another leaf of tobacco, and then the younguns put it on dressed sticks. The lugs, body and tips cured in each barn are kept in separate piles and sold that way. As fast as we git a barn graded I carry it off and sell it.

The Thigpen family had an old house behind their home which they used for grading, other farmers had a "grading room" attached to the packhouse. Graders were often in need of some method of heating the grading room since they worked in the late fall or early winter months. Once again the tobacco had to be "in order" with enough moisture so that workers could handle it without crumbling. The Thigpens separated the loose tobacco into five grades based on color and quality by placing it on a

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[16] Thigpen interview.

bench divided accordingly. Then they tied it in bundles and hung the bundles separated by grade on smooth sticks.[17]

Tobacco farmers transported the tied leaves arranged on the "grading sticks" to local warehouses for sale on the auction system. Thigpen remembered when his family hauled their tobacco the ten miles to Wilson in a two-horse wagon in the 1920s. Warehouses had mule pens to stable the draft animals, and farmers carried any feed necessary. By the 1930s Thigpen's father had invested in a Model-T truck for $425 and hauled for hire to pay for his investment.[18]

The addition of tobacco to Wilson County farms provided economic diversity lacking in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Southern agricultural societies since the 1850s had promoted the diversification of southern crops. As crop prices continued to decline in the 1880s, business leaders and newspaper editors also joined the promotion. Incorporated in his New South promotional efforts, Henry Grady promoted crop diversity as an important step in the creation of a viable southern economy. Grady was concerned that farmers were enslaved to cotton, a crop both overplanted and underpriced. To

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[17] Federal Writers, <u>These Are Our Lives</u>, 12-13; Thigpen interview.

[18] Ibid.

remedy the situation, Grady suggested that farmers reduce cotton production and plant the available land with different crop choices for income and home-use.[19]

Grady sought " a prosperous self-respecting race of small farmers, cultivating their own lands, living upon their own resources, controlling their crops until they are sold, and independent alike of usurers and provision brokers." Targeting the dependence on cotton as the predominant agricultural evil, Grady tried to persuade farmers to "make cotton their surplus crop," and spend more energy on home production.[20]

Grady's Georgia perspective focused on cotton as the nemesis of southern growers, but he also condemned tobacco if it hindered diversification:

> Whenever the greed for a money crop unbalances the wisdom of husbandry, the money crop is a curse. When it stimulates the general economy of the farm, it is the profiting of farming. In an unprosperous strip of Carolina, when asked the cause of their poverty, the people say, "Tobacco--for its is our only crop." In Lancaster, Pa., the richest American county by the census, when asked the cause of their prosperity, they say, "Tobacco--for it is the golden crown of a diversified agriculture."[21]

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[19] Gaston, New South Creed, 28-30; Harold E. Davis, Henry Grady's New South: Atlanta, a Brave and Beautiful City (Tuscaloosa: The Univ. of Alabama Press, 1990), 111.

[20] Henry Grady, "Cotton and Its Kingdom," in Joel Chandler Harris, Life of Henry W. Grady, Including His Writings and Speeches (New York: Cossell Publishing Co., 1890), 263.

[21] Henry Grady, "The South and Her Problems," in Harris, Life of Grady, 109-10.

Grady's comments came during the decade that Wilson County farmers were beginning to experiment with bright tobacco production. For newspaper publisher Josephus Daniels, the new crop was the "golden crown" of diversification for area farmers, an opportunity for a dual money-crop system in Wilson County. In 1885 Daniels wrote, "The Advance believes that to be independent our farmers must commence the culture of tobacco."[22]

Daniels viewed the introduction of bright tobacco cultivation to Wilson County as an additional money crop for area farmers, offering a buffer to the rise and fall of cotton prices. Comparisons of both cotton and tobacco prices and production levels indicate that Wilson farmers did indeed balance the production of cotton and tobacco based upon price fluctuations from 1890 until the 1920s. As cotton prices dropped from 1880-1900, farmers reduced cotton production and increased their tobacco crops. As the price of cotton rose to 9.15 cents per pound in 1900, Wilson farmers reversed their planting trend by increasing cotton production and decreasing tobacco. During the 1910s both cotton and tobacco prices were increasingly high, and county farmers produced large crops of both. Again when cotton prices declined after World War I, tobacco production increased as the county became less

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[22] The Wilson Advance, Jan. 15, 1885.

dependent on cotton.[23]

Having two money crops offered Wilson farmers flexibility in facing fluctuating markets and created opportunities not available to planters in a one-crop economy. This diversity in the first decades of the twentieth century allowed farmers to face periods of price declines in both cotton and tobacco as well as to capitalize on the years when both crops sold well. By alternating the two crops Wilson farmers initially achieved some aspects of New South agricultural diversity. Wilson farmers did reduce cotton plantings with tobacco in times of low prices and therefore accomplished Grady's plan to cut production and plant an alternative crop. Yet tobacco farmers constantly faced marketing problems, and by the 1920s both cotton and tobacco became victims of over-production and price declines.

During periods of low crop prices southern farmers often heard lectures from agricultural societies, extension workers, and the United States Department of Agriculture on the benefits of growing more products for home use. In the 1880s there was a concern that cotton farmers were placing less emphasis on self-sufficiency. Local as well as regional New South promoters stressed the

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[23] Crop comparisons, Appendix F; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 347; Eleventh Census, 396, 445; Twelfth Census, 433, 566; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census: 1920 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 100; Sixteenth Census, 150.

production of food stuffs to reduce the dependence on cotton. Production of food and feed for home use was an integral element in Grady's New South agricultural plan: "The South must prepare to raise her own provisions, compost her fertilizers, cure her own hay, and breed her own stock."[24]

In Wilson County Josephus Daniels recognized that local farmers often purchased products which they could have produced themselves. He used a jingle published in an area newspaper to illustrate the problem:

> A pound of cotton for a pound of meat,
> Is really very dear eating,
> The man who raises all cotton and no meat,
> Deserves a genteel beating.

Daniels also realized that part of the problem arose from the system of farm tenancy when "a farmer would agree to give the time merchant a pound of cotton in the fall in payment for a pound of meat furnished in the summer."[25]

The southern agricultural environment made it difficult for farmers to maintain antebellum self-sufficiency. Low crop prices, the crop lien, the use of commercial fertilizers, and the attraction of store-bought goods caused farmers to take more risks and plant cash crops. To economically stressed farmers, self-sufficiency meant less cash income even in times of low crop prices.

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[24] Grady, "Cotton and Its Kingdom," 270.

[25] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 150.

As farm sizes decreased, it took a greater percentage of the farm unit to meet the cash obligations.[26]

When farmers had to choose between working in the corn field or in the tobacco patch, the money crop took precedence. A Wilson County sharecropper complained that he could not always pull corn fodder to feed his mule because it was ready in July, the same time he was harvesting tobacco: "I needed the fodder all the time, but it comes off in tobacco barning time and we're pretty busy."[27]

There is difficulty in determining the definition as well as the extent of self-sufficiency in southern agriculture. Even in antebellum years farmers purchased certain items. Seventy percent of farmers in eight southern states reported that they maintained vegetable gardens in 1899. Much stock feed used at home never made it into the Census records. Farmers used corn fodder, pea vines, harvested crop land, and even weeds to feed livestock. Robert Gallman has defined self-sufficiency in terms of southern antebellum corn production. Gallman viewed corn as a home use crop, producing meal for the farm family and roughage and grain for meat and draft

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[26] Edward L. Ayers, The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction (New York: Oxford Univ, Press, 1992), 190; Newby, Plain Folk, 29, 35.

[27] Federal Writers, These Are Our Lives, 13.

animals.[28]

To use Gallman's definition of antebellum self-sufficiency for Wilson County from 1900-1940 would be misleading. The increase in corn and hay production for those years did not indicate an increase in meat production. Wilson County's 29,807 acres of corn in 1890 increased to 37,005 in 1900; forty years later in 1939 corn production reached 41,205 acres. Hay crops were almost stationary from 1890-1900, but escalated to over nine thousand acres in 1940. In spite of these increases, Wilson County farmers decreased hog and cattle production from 1900-1940. There was an increase in chicken numbers, but the major increase in livestock in Wilson County from 1900-1940 was in mules.[29]

Apparently mule workstock accounted for much of the increase in hay and corn production. From 1900-1940 mule numbers almost tripled in Wilson County, far outnumbering horses. By 1940 there were 6,549 mules on county farms. Yet farmers were not self-sufficient in mules; there were not enough mule colts to list in the 1940 census records. Farmers imported most of the mules by the train car loads

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[28] Fite, Cotton Fields, 36; Moore, Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom, 55; Robert Gallman, "Self-Sufficiency in the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South," Agricultural History (Jan. 1970): 5-23.

[29] Eleventh Census, 301, 341, 379, 445; Twelfth Census, 177, 254; Sixteenth Census, 367; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture: 1945 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), 64-65.

from Kentucky and Tennessee.[30]

For Wilson County farmers, the production of corn and hay was linked with cotton and tobacco tenancy as well as food production. Kyle Kauffman made the relation between the use of mule workstock and tenancy in southern agriculture when he noted that the mule "was a draft animal used where labor conditions were such that the person working the animal did not have a direct, vested interest in its maintenance and the animal's overall well being." New South self-sufficiency for Wilson County cotton and tobacco farmers must be measured in garden crops and corn and hay patches, not livestock numbers.[31]

The emphasis on home food production came in phases from 1890 to 1940, often depending on crop prices. L. S. Inscoe of Nash County clearly expressed the dilemma when he noted that agricultural extension agents often pushed the farmer toward diversification when crop surpluses occurred, but "when the farmer responded to this call, it was not long before problems with 'too much' came on the scene again." With high tobacco and cotton prices in the 1910s, emphasis on home production decreased until World

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[30] Twelfth Census, 466-467; Census of Agriculture: 1945, 124-125.

[31] Kyle D. Kauffman, "Why Was the Mule Used in Southern Agriculture? Empirical Evidence of Principal-Agent Solutions," Explorations in Economic History 30 (July 1993), 336-351; Charles Brice Ratchford, "Rental Arrangements in a Developing Economy" (Ph.D. diss., Duke Univ., 92-93, 194-96.

War I.[32]

Accounts listed in a ledger book from the J. L. Gay general store in the Wilson County town of Saratoga indicates that farmers bought few provisions during the 1910s. Farmer Jim Thigpen bought little from the local store in 1913: salt during the hog killing months of November and December, a file in May, and nails and coffee. None of the provisions could be provided from his farm. He paid the bill of $4.85 in part by loaning his corn planter to the store proprietor.[33]

By 1917 Governor T. W. Bickett lamented that North Carolina farmers imported too many corn, wheat, and meat products. In 1922 Governor Cameron Morrison also complained that no North Carolina county raised enough food to feed itself. With the boll weevil threatening Carolina farmers, Morrison stressed the need for alternative food crops. Best known of the promotions was Governor O. Max Gardner's "Live at Home" program of 1928. Like Grady's New South agricultural plan, Gardner hoped to reduce crop surpluses by getting farmers to plant more corn, hay, and grain. Within these same years the home demonstration agents from North Carolina State College also encouraged and advised rural families on food

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[32] Ricks, Nash County Notes, 226.

[33] J. L. Gay Ledger Book, 1913-14, owned by E. L. Thigpen, Saratoga, N.C., 96, 171, 212.

preservation. Further promotions for self-sufficiency came from the United States Department of Agriculture.[34]

There is evidence that rural southerners by the late 1920s produced a high percentage of their own food. In a 1926, study the USDA found that southern farmers produced 75 percent of food supplies, comparing favorably to Kansas and Nebraska farmers, who raised 64 percent. Percentages of self-sufficiency varied within southern states: in Mississippi, Delta areas of high black cropper density grew only 44 percent of food supplies, yet other areas of the state produced 66 percent. Small farmers in the South were more likely to produce food crops.[35]

Wilson County resident Robert McFarland who moved to Winston-Salem in 1925 reported that farmers living in the Old Belt were "much more economical than those of the New Belt. They raise their own food and bring much more of it to the Winston market for sale." What McFarland may have failed to perceive was that New Belt counties did not have large urban areas found in the Piedmont to market food crops. Food production of New Belt rural residents may

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[34] Fite, Cotton Fields, 95; Hugh T. Lefler, ed., North Carolina History Told by Contemporaries (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1934), 422-23; Powell, Through Four Centuries, 488; Anthony J. Badger, Prosperity Road: The New Deal, Tobacco, and North Carolina (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1980), 26-27.

[35] Fite, Cotton Fields, 116; Hobbs, Economic and Social Profile, 94.

not have been as obvious without a market outlet.[36]

There is no doubt that tenancy rates were higher in Wilson County than in the Piedmont, and such labor agreements may have hindered the production of a surplus of food crops. It is difficult to determine whether a drop of almost 3 percent in the county tenancy rate in the 1930s had any effect on food production. Bureau of Agricultural Economics' statistics did indicate that Wilson County farmers increased use of their farm products from 10.3 percent of all farm production in 1929 to 13.3 percent in 1939.[37]

Based on 1930s Federal Writer's Project interviews Wilson tobacco farmers realized the importance of self-sufficiency and attempted to achieve high levels of food production. During those years, retired Wilson County farm owner S. P. Boykin emphasized his reliance on home grown items:

> We always have a big garden, and it saves us a lot of money. Lots of people in the neighborhood buy canned goods, but we don't. My wife always has lots of canned tomatoes, corn, peaches, pears, huckleberries, jellies, preserves, and the like. She has some preserves back in that little closet under the stairs that she has kept for ten years. Not many folks can say that. In addition to the garden we have a cow that milks. From her we gets all the milk and butter that we need. The

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[36] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 107.

[37] Sixteenth Census, 319; Robert E. Martin, "Negro-White Participation in the AAA Cotton and Tobacco Referenda in North Carolina and South Carolina: A Study in Differential Voting and Attitudes in Selected Areas" (Ph.D diss., Univ. of Chicago, 1947), 148.

> chickens keep us in eggs, and we grow all the pork we need for meat and lard. We always have plenty of white potatoes and sweet potatoes, too. The sweet ones are harder to keep than the white ones. Ours are about gone now. We don't care for them so much anyway. We don't have a house to cure them in because we don't raise enough to make it worthwhile to build one. About all we have to buy is our sugar, rice, grits, coffee, tea, and a little oatmeal. We try to grow the rest of our food.

Boykin was living on property that had been in his family for over a hundred years and probably had long-established family traditions of food production. It is understandable that farm owners were the most likely to attempt self-sufficiency in the tobacco culture; their stability and farm management were usually conducive to food production.[38]

Generally southern tenant farmers were less able to produce food crops. Yet Gordon Blackwell's study of both black and white tobacco and cotton tenants in Green, Nash, and Wilson counties in the 1930s indicated a surprisingly large amount of food production. Although he did not designate a difference in share renters and sharecroppers, over 95 percent of those interviewed were croppers. Ninety-seven percent of surveyed tenants had raised chickens on a regular basis, 81 percent had raised pigs, and 19 percent had a cow, but "almost all" had raised truck crops and garden products. Tenants were less likely

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[38] Stanley Combs, "An Old Farmer," 1939, Federal Writers Project, Southern Historical Collection, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

to invest in larger and more costly livestock, requiring more fencing, food, and attention, but they were evidently allowed garden spaces and made use of them.[39]

Wilson County share tenant F. B. Brewer credited his home vegetables, meat, and milk as necessities for his family's survival. His daily meals consisted of canned and fresh vegetables and cured meat which the family raised on its tobacco and cotton farm. Brewer expressed pride in his wife's meals: "She can cook good beans, corn bread, fat back, and cabbage as anybody, and there ain't no better farm food than that."[40]

The ability to grow part of the family's provisions offered all levels of Wilson County farmers similar opportunities for independence from the growing commercialization of the farming environment. John and Sarah Easton were living in a one-room gas station in Wilson County in the 1930s. They were day laborers but were planning to return to sharecropping the next planting season. They regretted their loss of crop land to grow food for the family as they reminisced about better times when they were more self-sufficient:

> We started off on a ten-acre farm, four acres of tobacco, two of cotton, and four acres of corn. That didn't include the garden and the 'tater patch. We

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[39] Gordon Blackwell, "The Displaced Tenant Farm Family in North Carolina," Social Forces 13 (Oct. 1934), 69.

[40] Stanley Combs, "Some People are Destined To Never Have Anything," 1939, FWP, SHC.

> raised enough vegetable, hogs, and chickens for us, and our money crop bought the rest--you know, sugar, coffee and a piece of clothes now and then.[41]

The nature of the tenant, row crop, agricultural system in Wilson County was not conducive to much more than minimal self-sufficiency for many farmers. Many landlords allowed tenants to have garden space, but livestock for meat and milk was more expensive and difficult to house for most farmers. Both renters and owners continued to balance the cash crops with those for home use. Yet even with the increased labor of tobacco production, Wilson County farmers maintained varying levels of self-sufficiency.

Just as self-sufficiency fell short of desired goals on southern farms, so did the hope of the establishment of small farm units operated by owners. New South spokesman Henry Grady hoped that the plantation economy could be broken up into small farm units cultivated by a "self-respecting race of small farmers." When Sidney Lanier said, "The New South means small farming," he interpreted the increase in numbers of post-war southern farm units as an indication that economic democracy for farmers was developing.[42]

Nineteenth century Piedmont farmers of the Old Belt cultivated only small acreages of bright tobacco due to

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[41] Federal Writers, These Are Our Lives, 9.

[42] Gaston, New South Creed, 64.

lack of suitable land, in spite of large land holdings. Old Belt planters also found that Bright tobacco was even more labor intensive than cotton and thus had to limit tobacco production. When Bright tobacco moved into the Coastal Plain, suitable tobacco land was less an issue, but labor requirements remained to limit production. Many farmers grew only three to six acres of tobacco on small farms.[43]

From 1865-1929 Wilson County contained the smallest farm units in the Coastal Plain. Although the county never contained many farms over five-hundred acres after 1890 when tobacco production was established, county farm units in those categories declined from sixty-four units to four by 1940. Only in the 1970s did the county again consolidate as many as fifty-one farms with five hundred and above acres. Most Wilson farms were in much smaller acreage categories. In 1920 out of 4,439 farms there were 2,005 county farms with acreage between twenty to forty-nine acres. That category of farm units remained the dominant farm size until the 1960s.[44]

In Wilson County the large number of small farms was

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[43] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 89-91.

[44] Ibid., 91-93; Eleventh Census, 170; Fourteenth Census, 80-81; Sixteenth Census, 336; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture: 1969 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), 777; Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture: 1979 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981), 692; Ratchford, "Rental Arrangements," 93.

reflective of increasing tenancy of the 1865-1940 period. One of the reasons that Wilson planters could easily incorporate tobacco into their farming operations was its success as a tenant crop. Planters had well established cotton tenancy before the first plantings of the bright leaf in the last decades of the nineteenth century. As farm owners and managers began to merge tobacco plantings with cotton cultivations, they did so with tenant and sharecrop labor.

Tobacco, like cotton, had similar aspects suitable to tenancy. It was a crop which had little value unless sold, therefore a tenant could not take advantage of his landlord by consuming the crop for home-use except in a very limited way. Cured leaf could be stored for periods of time, although not as long as cotton, but usually was sold in the fall after harvest. Tobacco sales also yielded high income for landowners with little expense for equipment. Because of these qualities, lenders saw tobacco as a suitable crop to finance.[45]

Planters had already established the precedent for share tenancy in the Old Belt by the mid-nineteenth century, and that labor system increased as farmers adopted bright tobacco cultivation in the Coastal Plain. Wilson County farm tenancy rates increased during the post-Civil War years from over 56 percent in 1889 when

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[45] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 93.

bright tobacco was in its infancy to 69 percent in 1910. As farm tenancy increased in the county, it included more whites than blacks: the 2,354 farms operated by tenants in 1910 included 1,311 operated by whites along with 1,043 black-operated farms. By 1929, 79 percent of Wilson County farms were operated by tenants.[46]

Having established its tenant system for a cotton culture, Wilson County planters maintained similar labor agreements when they added tobacco production. The labor agreements developed on Wilson County cotton farms by the 1870s remained the models for rental agreements in the twentieth century. Charles Brice Ratchford found eleven categories for farm operators in the North Carolina Coastal Plain in the 1940s, with three predominant tenant classifications: cash or standing rent tenants who paid for the use of the land either in money or a set number of crop shares; share tenants who paid half to a fifth of the crop at harvest as rent; and croppers who were share tenants without management in the crop. Ratchford's cropper description had not changed from North Carolina's 1874 legal definition of the sharecropper. Through the years Wilson County rental arrangements consisted of more cropper agreements than any of the other classifications. In 1910 there were 2,088 croppers of Wilson's 2,354

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[46] Ibid., 95; Thirteenth Census, 254-55.

tenants.[47]

Often for would-be tobacco farmers tenancy was the only solution to achieve necessary financing. Lack of adequate credit was still unavailable to most farmers until New Deal legislation of the 1930s. Even then many renters and croppers were not the recipients of government loans, instead depending on local landlords and merchants for their furnishings. Farmers seeking financing often had landlords who furnished them throughout the year until harvest time. There were instances in which the landlord bought supplies in bulk and then parceled them out to tenants. Other landlords set up credit at a local store, allowing tenants to make limited choices, often with prior approval.[48]

In return for being furnished, the tenant gave the landlord a lien on the crop as collateral. In other cases landlords completely shied away from furnishing tenants and encouraged them to make their own arrangements with merchants. In these situations, the merchant held the lien on the crop. If there were liens with both landlord and merchant, the landlord enjoyed legal precedent. With a merchant lien, the tenant was forced to make all

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[47] Ratchford, "Rental Arrangements," 84-85; Vance, Human Geography, 190; Thirteenth Census, 254-55.

[48] Ratchford, "Rental Arrangements," 20; Mangum, Legal Status, 5-6; Woodman, "Agriculture and the Law," 330; Ayers, Promise of the New South, 90.

purchases with the lender, and therefore had limited ability to make more economical purchases elsewhere.[49]

The lienholder took out the lien at the beginning of the crop to cover production and living provisions for the tenant, then deducted the expenses from the tenants share of the crop at "settling up time." It was not uncommon for some tenants to be unable to "pay out" in the fall if there was a poor crop. Collateral not only consisted of the crop but could also consist of farm equipment and personal property, with indebtedness carrying over to the next crop. From the tenants' perspective, the crop lien was another form of enslavement of both blacks and poor whites.[50]

In the nineteenth century Alpheus Branch, proprietor of the Branch-Hadley mercantile business and founder of the Branch Banking and Trust Company in Wilson, was reminded of his harsh treatment of needy farmers "by paying Wilson farmers too little for their cotton and charging them too much for fat-back and fertilizer." The criticism of Branch was typical of that focused on other lenders in the postbellum South well into the twentieth century. Notoriously high rates of interest for short

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[49] Woodman, "Agriculture and the Law," 330, 334; Ransom, One Kind Of Freedom, 127; Ayers, Promise of the New South, 93.

[50] Newby, Plain Folk, 28; Ransom, One Kind Of Freedom, 123; Woodman, "Agriculture and the Law," 331; Vance, Human Geography, 190.

term furnishing seemed to be more common than not.[51]

High charges occurred because most farmers obtained credit through a second round of lenders. Landlords and supply merchants often obtained their credit from banks, to whom they paid interest, thus they required high interest rates from farmers to make a profit. Other lenders with thir own lending capital charged high interest to be in line with going rates. Regardless of where the capital originated, all lenders had to contend with risks of weather, the market, and poor creditors.[52]

Sometimes lenders were less than honest in their dealings with tenants. E. L. Thigpen remembered that it was common practice in the 1930s for those who furnished farmers to charge a flat 10 percent interest. Lenders assessed a 10 percent charge regardless of when the borrower received the loan during the calendar year. The flat ten percent charge, although legal in North Carolina by 1939, not only kept the actual interest unclear to the borrower but was also easy for lenders to calculate.[53]

Often tenants remained unsure of their income until

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[51] Daniels, Tar Heel Editor, 142-43.

[52] Mandel, Roots of Black Poverty, 48-49; Billings, Planters, 147; T. J. Woofter, Jr., The Plight of Cigarette Tobacco (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1931), 15; Vance, Human Geography, 198; C. Van Woodard, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1971), 184.

[53] Thigpen interview; Mandel, Roots of Black Poverty, 50.

the end of the harvest. Thigpen related the story of a tenant who went to his landlord, telling him that he had sold the last of the tobacco and was ready to settle up. The landlord subtracted the furnishing fees from the tenant's share of the crop and determined that the tenant was due only ten dollars for his year's work. Without complaint, the tenant asked for a receipt indicating that he had paid out for that year. Once the receipt was in hand, the tenant then announced that he had failed to mention that there were another two barns of tobacco to sell. The surprised landlord then replied that he needed to refigure, having made a mistake the first time. Thigpen admitted that the story was undocumented, but it circulated among county farmers and it labeled an already notorious landlord. Word of mouth did much to identify difficult as well as benevolent landowners.[54]

Thigpen also noted that the mobility of tenants also labeled landlords: "You could tell who the bad people were because everybody they had moved away every year. When treated with respect and dignity, these people stayed." Tenants with fair landlords remained for many years on the same farm, defying the normal tenant mobility found throughout the South. Even with good work situations, tenants often moved, seeking security or less supervision in an insecure system. Most moved within their own

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[54] Thigpen interview.

community, usually during the winter months after harvest and before the plowing season.[55]

F. R. Flowers of Elm City in Wilson County began his farming career as a cash rent tenant, paying his rent at harvest. He and his wife Estelle moved to four different farms in a period of sixteen years, remaining one year on the first farm, two years on the second, eight years on the third, and five years on the fourth, all in the same community. Reasons for the moves varied: the owners of the first place planned to move back, so the Flowers had to leave; locating the second farm in haste, they stayed only two years. Remaining on the other farms for reasonably long periods, they were able to purchase their own farm in 1953, farming there the rest of their careers until retirement in the 1960s.[56]

Although tenants entrapped in an unpaid lien may have had some difficulty in moving, sometimes landlords were glad to release them, fearing that they were poor credit risks. Even when tenant debtors left a farm, there was little legal recourse; getting payment from many tenants was not worth the effort for landlords and merchants. Unless the tenant had farm equipment of value, there was

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[55] Ibid; Mangum, Legal Status, 14; Newby, Plain Folk, 52; Cobb, Most Southern, 105-7; Ayers, Promise of the New South, 197; Vance, Human Geography, 210; Lefler, Contemporaries, 426-27; Mandel, Roots of Black Poverty, 20-21.

[56] Flowers interview.

little to repossess. Some tenant families had so few personal possessions that lenders in need of workers had to waive lien requirements in order for the family to obtain supplies. The reality was that landlords and merchants needed tenants to work the crops, and they often made unprofitable lending arrangements in their efforts to maintain laborers.[57]

Differing motives of the landlord and tenant often created conflicts between the two. Landlords needed dependable workers who would be available throughout the growing and harvest seasons. James Cobb has observed that landlords tried to keep tenants "economically dependent enough to ensure that they would be ready to work whenever labor was needed without creating a sense of hopelessness and frustration great enough to cause them to seek employment elsewhere." That thin balance was often difficult to maintain. While some landlords hid economic motives with acts of kindness, others were sincere and sought to create reasonably fair labor agreements. In North Carolina where large landholdings were less prevalent, often the landlord cultivated a crop on the same farm on which his tenant also labored. This type of labor situation created a closer bond between both classes

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[57] Woodman, "Agriculture and the Law," 332-35; Ransom, One Kind Of Freedom, 121-22; Mangum, Legal Status, 8, 13; Vance, Human Geography, 198.

of farmers and meant a more benevolent landlord.[58]

Often there was a clash of values between tenants and landlords. Landlords usually came from different social and economic backgrounds and held different perspectives toward the work ethic. Some landlords were never satisfied with tenant efforts and felt that all tenants, both white and black, were "sorry" workers and managers. Tenants who experienced limited control of their economic and social situation often coped with life by following a different value system than landlords. Irregular work patterns, and lack of self-discipline characterized tenants with low expectations.[59]

The tenant labor system was a social as well as an economic arrangement with both black and white sharecroppers at the bottom of the ladder. Ideally the cropper stage was a step toward share renting and then cash renting, before land ownership. In reality it was difficult for most sharecroppers to reach the level of farm ownership. Many of those who did finally operate their own farms began the process a step or so up the ladder from that of the cropper. The fine line between sharecropper and share renter was often only the ownership of a mule, but it meant that the renter received more

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[58] Cobb, Most Southern Place, 103; Newby, Plain Folk, 36-37.

[59] Ibid., 41-46.

income from the farm and could place him further toward land ownership.[60]

Interviews with F. B. Brewer provide an example of a share renter in Wilson County, where he, his wife, and five children farmed thirty-five acres in the 1930s. Brewer considered that his six acres of tobacco was his only money crop, although he also planted an equal amount of cotton. In 1938 Brewer's half share was $450.00, but his part of the fertilizer had to come out of that amount. Brewer's landlord got a third of the 1939 crop.[61]

Although he complained that none of his family owned more than one set of clothes, Brewer stated that he carried no debt and was able to furnish himself. He owned two mules and necessary farm equipment in addition to an automobile. When he sent his sons to saw some stove wood, they used a saw powered by a gasoline engine. In all, the Brewers maintained a large amount of independence from their landlord. Brewer remarked, "We ain't never ask him for anything, and he seems just satisfied to let us alone."[62]

Brewer attempted to live off the farm as much as

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[60] Harold D. Woodman, "Sequel to Slavery," The Journal of Southern History 43 (Nov. 1977), 552; Newby, Plain Folk, 46-47; Cobb, Most Southern, 72; Wright, Political Economy, 177.

[61] Combs, "Destined."

[62] Ibid.

possible by utilizing family labor and producing much of the food supply. The two boys did the plowing and wood sawing, and his wife and the two daughters at home canned garden produce each year. Brewer also owned twenty-one shoats, enough for both meat and market, and a cow and chickens. He was concerned about the need to live at home in order to make ends meet and get ahead.[63]

Sometimes it took more than hard work and proper management for Wilson County tenants to accumulate enough for payment on a farm. For Bud and Estelle Flowers it took many years of work and the opportunity to purchase some family land on reasonable terms. Flowers began farming with his brother-in-law as his first landlord in Edgecombe County. He was able to begin his career with mules and equipment and thus was already far ahead of many who never achieved that crucial stage. Sixteen crops later, in 1953, he moved to Wilson County and purchased a farm from other family members.[64]

Probably few Wilson County sharecroppers actually reached the level of farm ownership, but success stories of croppers becoming landowners circulated in the county as encouragement for those at the bottom of the economic ladder. Born in 1909, Arpe Newton and his twin brother moved to Nash County in the early 1930s where they worked

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Flowers interview.

as tenants growing thirty acres of tobacco. Within two years they took the opportunity to move back to Wilson County to grow sixty acres of tobacco. When his brother moved to another farm, Newton managed the farm himself, using wood fired barns, hired labor, and twelve mules. The work reduced Newton's body weight as much as thirty pounds a season, but by the 1930s he began payments on his own property. Fifty years later he was owner of four farms and had held many business and leadership positions.[65]

Jonathan Daniels characterized tobacco tenancy as the "stretch-out of agriculture." In comparison with cotton, Daniels saw that tobacco tenancy created "a better body of people, stronger and more skilled, worthy of more notice." In Daniels' view the tobacco tenant provided the landlord more income than he would as a cotton tenant, yet endured all the problems of the cotton culture, such as uncertain tenure, poor credit, landlord problems. Although tobacco tenants worked harder to produce a crop and developed more skills than cotton growers, many still found themselves unable to advance up the tenant ladder to farm ownership. In Wilson County the cotton and tobacco tenant were often one in the same.[66]

Daniels did admit that tobacco tenants were not an

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[65] The Wilson Daily Times, June 17, 1989.

[66] Daniels, Tar Heels, 83-84.

unhappy lot. Most preferred their work to mill jobs. Wilson County share renter F. B. Brewer acknowledged the difficulties of farming, "but I believe it is about the best life that a man can live. There is plenty of hard work in it, but there is a lot of freedom also." Brewer may have adapted his desires to realities; he felt that there were little opportunities for "a fellow like me" to obtain a "decent job in town." Instead of desiring another vocation, Brewer maintained hopes of owning land some day.[67]

While tenants and small farmers worked the tobacco, cotton, and corn in rural areas of Wilson County, many of their landlords lived in the town of Wilson. For Jonathan Daniels, the tree-lined main street of Wilson became a symbol of absentee landlords and tobacco wealth in the 1930s:

> Nash Street in Wilson is one of the four or five loveliest streets in the South. The pavement is narrow between the elms planted a long time ago, but the houses sit far back from the curbs. Not all of them were built with tobacco money. People got rich on cotton, country rich, before tobacco came.... It does get hot, but the street seems always cool, a mile-long quiet coolness which runs under trees suddenly to the packed, new, prosperous-looking center of the greatest flue-cured tobacco market in the world.... Wealthy planters, in a new Southern pattern, live town-far from the people on their plantations who do the labor, which once would have been performed by slaves around a master who lived among them--and around a mistress, too. Sometimes now a mistress does not even know where

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[67] Ibid.; Combs, "Destined."

such people are. Freedom has worked both ways.[68]

For Wilson County farmers, the benefit of the New South tobacco diversity was paradoxical. By adding tobacco to cotton production, farmers did have the ability to market two crops. Tobacco production created farmers with management and skill levels over and beyond that of cotton. Over time the tobacco tenant in Wilson County achieved a higher social and economic status than that of a cotton tenant. A talented tobacco farmer was an asset to any landlord, providing the opportunity to have an added money crop. The labor and skills necessary to produce tobacco plants on time, the management of work crews, and the expertise needed to cure and grade tobacco required discipline and organization. Yet the skills acquired did not always reap rewards. There were increasing numbers of tenants from 1900-1940, all at various levels of the economic ladder, and few on the move up. For the majority of these farmers, tenancy created an obstruction to the New South dream of becoming the small, self-sufficient, yeoman farmer. Instead absentee landlords, many who made their money first on cotton, seemed economically well-off. Jonathan Daniels summed up the paradox of the tobacco tenant:

> In hardly any other crop does skill all the way make such a difference in what the farmer gets for what he grows. And with the greatest skill at last, if he

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[68] Daniels, Tar Heels, 78, 83-84.

counts by the year, he may make more money than in cotton; but if he counts by the hour at the lowest farm wages for the labor of himself and his family and by the backache, he has more chance to lose than win."[69]

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[69] Ibid., 85.

CHAPTER 4

THE MARKET SYSTEM

Encouraged by New South newspaper editors and agriculturalists to plant tobacco as a supplement to cotton production in the 1880s, Wilson County planters shipped their tobacco to the closest markets in Henderson and Oxford. By 1890 when local tobacco cultivation increased enough to justify an auction system, planters combined efforts with other businessmen to develop the first tobacco warehouse in Wilson. Other markets were already successful in the Piedmont, creating needed income for depressed agricultural economies, and Wilson boosters hoped that their own market would capture business generated by a tobacco auction system. In 1890 the editor of The Wilson Mirror, Henry Blount, eagerly awaited the opening of the new tobacco market. To Blount, the market was another step in the development of Wilson County's New South tobacco economy:

> Wilson has a population of 3,500 situated on the Atlantic Coast Line of railways, fifty-four miles south of Weldon, and twenty-four miles north of Goldsboro, possessing more natural advantages for a tobacco market, being in the centre of the new fine tobacco belt, with ample railroad facilities. I have no hesitancy in saying in a few years' time it will eclipse her sister markets in quantity sold, as it has already, her sister counties in the production of the golden leaf.

Blount's prophesy was to become reality. In 1919 the

Wilson market surpassed tobacco sales of Danville, Virginia, and by 1939 Wilson assumed the title, "World's Greatest Tobacco Market."[1]

Fall tobacco sales became important to all levels of Wilson's economy. The opening of the tobacco auction created a festive atmosphere in town, bringing long-awaited seasonal income to local businessmen as well as to farmers. Encouraged by economic gains, businessmen promoted the expansion of Wilson's warehouses and aided in advertisements to attract increased tobacco sales. Wilson planters built the massive tobacco warehouse system, but the market also attracted new leadership and investment from youthful entrepreneurs outside the community. These early warehousemen seized opportunities in the bright tobacco frontier and quickly established themselves in the Wilson economy and society. At the warehouse management levels Horatio Alger stories were not uncommon, but for other warehouse workers success came in varying amounts. The seasonal schedule of the tobacco market maintained the agricultural economic pattern of Wilson County. For many, the Wilson Tobacco Market provided only limited employment, forcing workers to seek additional farm work and maintaining the agricultural labor force needed for area crops.

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[1] The Wilson Mirror, Mar. 5, 1890; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 218; The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 17, 1956.

The warehouse system of marketing evolved out of colonial tobacco selling methods in Virginia. Originally English merchants bought the crop on consignment and provided planters with both credit and supplies. Much like the cotton factor, the tobacco merchant maintained great economic power over the planter. The relationship between buyer and seller placed planters in the position of selling their best quality leaf, hoping to please the merchants.[2]

As tobacco cultivation spread into the back country, brokers opened markets in port cities, ending old planter-merchant relationships. When dealing with anonymous buyers with no credit connections, planters began to conceal inferior tobacco in hogsheads. To insure quality tobacco for buyers, Virginia began an inspection system at public warehouses by 1730. North Carolina soon followed and by 1790 enacted laws to govern the inspection warehouses. This leaf examination system was not entirely effective, and buyers became increasingly dissatisfied with results. They began to grade the tobacco themselves when the inspectors broke open the hogsheads. As buyers followed the inspectors from hogshead to hogshead, they placed bids on the leaf, and the job of inspector evolved

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[2] Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 210; Breen, Tobacco Culture, 84-123.

into that of an auctioneer.[3]

During the 1830s some manufacturers began to purchase unprized tobacco directly from the planters, and by the next decade farmers often brought loose leaf to the inspection warehouses for sale. Also during the decade planters began to sell their tobacco at auction in the open streets of Danville, Virginia. Buyers bought the leaf on the farmer's wagon and then weighed it later. The selling arrangement lacked regulation and often created dissatisfaction between both buyer and seller.[4]

The creation of the first loose leaf tobacco warehouse in Danville in 1858 marked the beginning of the "Danville system" of tobacco sales. Loose leaf sales benefitted small farmers who did not produce enough tobacco to fill a hogshead and allowed buyers to fully inspect their purchases. With a quick sale, farmers received immediate payment for their crop. The new tobacco sales system became a model for other bright tobacco areas, and by the 1870s North Carolina cities of Durham, Reidsville, Winston, and Henderson began similar markets. Having formerly sold their tobacco in Virginia, Carolina farmers flocked to the local markets in the Old

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[3] Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 211.

[4] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 198-99.

Belt.[5]

For almost twenty years the Henderson market was the closest tobacco auction available to many Coastal Plain producers. Through an aggressive advertising campaign, Henderson warehouseman David Cooper attracted tobacco sellers and buyers to his auction house. The majority of his customers brought their tobacco by the wagon loads from fifteen neighboring counties. Cooper made Henderson into a tobacco town and developed a North Carolina market on the eastern end of the Old Belt which rivaled Virginia markets. He attracted buyers by persuading the Allen and Ginter cigarette manufacturers to establish a stemmery in the Henderson area.[6]

Most Wilson County tobacco farmers were too far from the Henderson market to transport their crops by wagon in the 1880s. They shipped their tobacco packed in hogsheads by rail to Henderson. Often farmers escorted their crop to insure its safety and to oversee sales. Railroad construction increased the opportunities for other towns to add tobacco markets. In 1881 Oxford opened a market which attracted Wilson growers, but farmers found the Rocky Mount market, opening in nearby Nash County in 1887,

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[5] Ibid., 200-201, 206.

[6] Ibid., 211; The Wilson Mirror, Aug. 27, 1890.

more convenient.[7]

With the promotional efforts of Captain Edmund M. Pace, local businessmen and planters opened the Wilson Tobacco Warehouse on September 10, 1890. Anticipation of the opening of the Wilson tobacco market created a carnival-like atmosphere among all aspects of the community. Many farmers were first-time growers who were awaiting the sale of a new crop. Their creditors were equally interested in tobacco prices, especially with eight-cent cotton. Fifty years later, N. G. Blackmam wrote about the first tobacco sales in Wilson:

> The opening day of the Wilson Tobacco Market brought thousands of farmers from the country. It is said that on that day every man, woman, and child for miles around was present to witness the sale. The little wooden warehouse in which the first sale was held was chock-a-block with piles of tobacco, and some of it not so golden because of the lack of experience of the farmers in raising the new crop.... Those thousands of men, women, and children from both town and country were massed together in the warehouse district. On every street, buggies, carts, and wagons were lined up, one behind the other in every available parking space. As the auctioneer began his cry for the top bid promptly at 9 o'clock, all eyes were focused on this one man, and onlookers were held spellbound at the novel method of selling tobacco.[8]

The enthusiasm of Wilson's opening day of the tobacco market in 1890 became a lasting tradition. For a town and community dependent on yearly harvests, the tobacco

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[7] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 222-23; The News and Observer, May 18, 1940; Ricks, Nash County Notes, 216.

[8] The Wilson Advance, Sept. 14, 1893; The News and Observer, May 18, 1940.

sales meant long-awaited income. Longtime Wilson County farmer Preston Harrell remembered the excitement: "Opening day was like a holiday. It was like Christmas for the farmers because it was the time when they'd get the first reward for the work they'd put into the crop all year." Regardless of the economic level, residents felt that pay day had arrived when the auctioneer's yearly chant began. Each year during harvest season, Wilson businessmen invested in advertisements and window displays to welcome the beginning of the auction sales and targeted cash-rich farm families with sale merchandise. At market time, shoe salesmen shared a common goal with mule dealers, both hoping to sell their goods while the money lasted. Harrell noted that Wilson businessmen depended on the tobacco crop as much as anyone:

> Downtown stores looked forward to it as much as the farmers, because it meant they'd be getting some money again and their families would begin to fill their cupboards and buy clothes and supplies for the school children.[9]

As the Wilson market grew, both permanent and seasonal businesses emerged, catering to farmers with money in their pockets. Hot dog and hamburger stands lined Goldsboro Street, running through the heart of the warehouse district. Barkers standing in warehouse doors proclaimed the advantages of selling tobacco at their sales houses. In most markets less legitimate vendors

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[9] The Wilson Daily Times, Sept. 28, 1985.

also sought their share of tobacco money. Jonathan Daniels described the fair-haired youth in an Indian headdress selling patent medicine to the crowd on the Greenville Market in the late 1930s:

> There were, I knew, more Indian boys and purse snatchers and prostitutes and liquor stores and high pressure businessmen all waiting behind the time merchant and the landlord for what is left. But there is thrift, too. You could see it in the eyes of some of the women waiting for their husbands to come back from the warehouses. Boys go from little farms to State College. The East Carolina Teachers College (Eeseeteesee) in Greenville is filled with girls from the farms. Some of the most substantial looking people rode in the oldest cars.[10]

By the 1930s the Wilson Chamber of Commerce took advantage of local enthusiasm during market time and began the North Carolina Tobacco Exposition and Festival. Lester Rose, executive director of the Chamber, organized the first one-day festival in 1936. Rose was aware of the scope of Wilson's tobacco culture and planned events appealing to various social and economic classes. The 1937-1941 festivals were three-day events with parades attracting 50,000 people, including the governor. Each festival held a beauty pageant to choose a queen who was then crowned as a part of the festivities. Local girls could hold the titles of princesses, but queen contestants had to come from outside Wilson. The festival pageant thus became a state contest, advertising Wilson's tobacco

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[10] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 204; Daniels, Tar Heels, 90-91; Clark, "Reflections," 753.

market. The warehouse dance became the "coronation ball" and through the years attracted bands led by Paul Whiteman, Jan Garber, Ozzie Nelson and Harriet Hilliard, Dean Hudson and Tommy Byrnes. Rose moved on to direct the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, and World War II ended the festivals in 1941. After the war the festivals began again for a few years. The last Tobacco Festival in 1948 brought Perry Como, Arthur Godfrey, and the Fontaine Sisters. That year the Wilson Tobacco Market received coast-to-coast radio coverage when Godfrey and the Chesterfield Supper Club broadcast from the Wilson festival.[11]

Tobacco festivals almost disguised the real work of the markets, much of which had already been accomplished before the warehouse sales began. Farmers within reasonable distances transported their tobacco by wagon. Farmers parked empty wagons outside warehouses and stabled their mules in communal "mule pens" in warehouse basements. Often in the early years of the market, farmers had to spend the night in town in order to make the trip, unload, and see their tobacco sold. To accommodate farmers who had to remain overnight, warehouses had "bunk rooms." By the 1930s Ford trucks had

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[11] The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 17, 1970; The News and Observer, Aug. 3, 1947; Clark, "Reflections," 89, 538, 587, 766.

replaced much of the wagon hauling and allowed many farmers to get to market and return home in one day. Watson Warehouse in Wilson still advertised "sleeping quarters" with steam heat for overnight farmers as late as 1942.[12]

Warehousemen employed laborers to unload the wagons and place the tobacco according to grade in piles on low hand trucks. After weighing and tagging each pile, workers carefully slid it on to the sales floor. At the early tobacco sales in Wilson, each buying company had four laborers to follow the buyers and remove purchased tobacco by placing two-inch ropes around each pile to scoot it across the floor. Workers then placed the tobacco in baskets for removal to processing plants. By 1904 Coastal Plain markets were using shallow baskets to keep tobacco off the floor from the time it left the farmer's wagon. Baskets aided in movement and prevented contamination from manure and stray tobacco leaves.[13]

Tobacco selling and buying techniques evolved over the years. Early Virginia tobacco sales began with the blowing of a bugle or ringing of a bell to signal the

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[12] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 220-21, 226; The Wilson Daily Times, Oct. 4, 1939; Aug. 21, 1942.

[13] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 205, 237-38; Lefler, History of North Carolina, 601; The News and Observer, May 18, 1940.

beginning of the auction. Workers at Wilson's Liberty Warehouse continued the tradition as late as the 1950s when a "liberty bell" rang before the beginning of sales. Led by the warehouseman's starting bid, the auctioneer moved down the tobacco piles, chanting out bids coupled with sing-song phrases. Buyers followed on each side of the piles as they signaled their bids usually with nonverbal communication. As an auctioneer reached an acceptable price, the buyer indicated his bid by a wink or nod. The auctioneer announced the buyer without interrupting his chant. Made famous by radio commercials, "Sold American" became the most famous final bid. Buyers preferred certain positions in the auction line where they could attract the auctioneer's eye. Over the years buyers assumed preferred positions in the lineup based on their buying record the previous year. The firm with the highest record of purchases gained first choice in the lineup for the season, with others following accordingly.[14]

Buyers bidding on the tobacco piles represented a varied group of purchasers: warehousemen, pinhookers, leaf dealers, and manufacturers. At times an alliance existed among some of these buyers, but more often they were

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[14] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 238-40; Daniels, Tar Heels, 88-89; The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 11, 1979; Clark, "Reflections," 514.

competitors. The warehousemen, pinhookers, and leaf dealers were all middlemen with the desire to speculate on tobacco before it was sold to the manufacturer.[15]

Warehousemen often bought tobacco which did not receive top bids. A warehouse representative followed the buyers' line and bid on low-priced tobacco which could later be resold for profit after regrading and repacking the pile. At times the warehouseman bought the tobacco to help out a farmer. Even if the purchase did not bring a higher price later, the purchase often proved to be good business, especially since tobacco farmers and warehousemen had uneasy relationships. Some farmers saw the warehouseman as a friend, while others viewed him as a speculator who gained "the real profit" through guaranteed sales fees.[16]

To remain in the warehouse business, one had to be able to relate to both seller and buyer. Those who were successful retained their patrons year after year. Throughout his career Wilson warehouseman Will Anderson used various methods of showmanship to appeal to his patrons, but one particular incident during the 1920s indicates his methods. Anderson knew that farmers were discontented with declining leaf prices, so he had his

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[15] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 251.

[16] The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 11, 1979; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 290-92; Clark, "Reflections," 787.

sales manager place two hay bales and a sack of oats at the end of the sales row. As the auction ended for the morning, his suggestion to the buyers brought applause from farmers: "Well, Gentlemen tobacco buyers, you have acted all morning like a bunch of jackasses; so, now, take-out for your dinner."[17]

"Pinhookers" were independent businessmen who hoped to acquire cheap tobacco to repack and resell for profit. Farmers often viewed them as profiteers taking advantage of low prices at the producers' expense. As highways improved, pinhookers often bought tobacco at one market and resold at another, sometimes all in the same day. One afternoon in 1924 a pinhooker sold tobacco on the Wilson market which he had purchased only a few hours earlier that morning. Warehousemen felt that pinhookers helped tobacco prices and sometimes used them to bid up tobacco sales. Pinhookers met lean years at times when tobacco was in demand by other buyers, and they were sometimes victims of producers who "nested tobacco" with poor quality leaf hidden in piles. Over the years pinhookers faded from the tobacco market with the introduction of government grading, buying, and selling restrictions.[18]

Leaf dealers were also speculators, but on a larger scale than pinhookers. They bought tobacco to reprocess

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[17] Clark, "Reflections," 860.

[18] Tilley, 298-302; Thigpen interview.

or redry for sale to manufacturers. Some leaf dealers owned their own prizehouses; others bought on commission or contract with manufacturers. Leaf dealers were in competition with the Tobacco Trust from its beginning in 1889 until its demise in 1911. At times the farmers, hoping to avoid price fixing, sided with the leaf dealers against the Tobacco Trust, yet by the 1910s some leaf dealers became powerful themselves.[19]

Tobacco manufacturers also maintained their own buyers on the auction markets. These buyers had orders from their company to purchase certain grades of tobacco to meet manufacturing needs. Companies maintained a two-year supply of tobacco in storage to have a cushion during periods of poor quality leaf. Before government grading, the manufacturers maintained their own grades and instructed buyers to buy certain grades within price limits. Buyers were able to average their purchases, buying some tobacco within the same grade for lower bids than others. From the individual farmer's standpoint, the buyer offered different prices for the same quality tobacco. Farmers also questioned if buyers from different companies cooperated to keep prices low, but no proof surfaced of their collusion.[20]

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[19] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 255, 262-63, 282-83.

[20] Woofter, Plight of Cigarette Tobacco, 43, 45-46; Daniels, Tar Heels, 87.

By 1893 the Wilson tobacco dealers formed a Tobacco Board of Trade composed of those who bought or sold tobacco on the Wilson market. Warehousemen and processors paid annual dues to finance the board's office. Each member had a vote and selected officers from among the members. The Wilson Tobacco Board of Trade set selling policies, regulated sales, and policed warehousemen and buyers. The board also often issued promotional material and defended the market system when necessary. President of the Wilson Tobacco Board of Trade in 1911, R. P. Watson, castigated the editor of The Wilson Times for promoting a reduction of the tobacco crop in order to maintain high prices:

> It is the sense of our Board of Trade that the statements contained in your editorial are calculated to seriously injure our market, our city and a large number of our citizens who are deeply interested in the tobacco business. The Wilson market should have all the credit and assistance that it is entitled to.

The editor of the paper was quick to apologize and explain his intentions were not to harm the market.[21]

In order to sell the vast poundage of tobacco, Wilson businessmen built twelve auction warehouse structures by 1929; nine were active that year. After the construction of the Wilson Warehouse in 1890, others steadily followed: Planters Warehouse in 1891, Centre Brick Warehouse in

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[21] The Wilson Advance, Jan. 12, 1893; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 248-50; The Wilson Daily Times, July, 2, 1976; The Wilson Times, Jan. 24, 1911.

1893, Watson Warehouse in 1896, Star Tobacco Warehouse in 1897, Banner Warehouse in 1899, Farmers Warehouse in 1903, Liberty Warehouse in 1904, Planters Warehouse in 1920, New Smith Warehouse Company Warehouse in 1924, Smith Warehouse in 1928, and in 1929 Smith Warehouse #B. These warehouses made up the "warehouse district," located within walking distance of the business section of Wilson. After the 1920s warehouse construction was outside the district. Builders located the Big Star Warehouse in 1939 and the New Planters Warehouse in 1940 in areas on the edge of town where property was available and affordable.[22]

The wooden construction of the Wilson Warehouse in 1890 was not typical of most of the others to come. By 1893 warehouse builders constructed more substantial structures of brick, modeled after tobacco warehouses found in other Virginia and North Carolina market towns. The Centre Brick Warehouse built in 1893 was Wilson's first brick tobacco warehouse. By 1899 with the construction of the Banner Warehouse, the style was set for some years to come.[23]

Spanning a city block, the Banner Warehouse sat on sloping land with its main level opening on Tarboro Street and a basement at ground level with side and back streets.

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[22] Clark, "Reflections," 15-19, 22.

[23] Ibid., 270-71, 786-87.

A freight elevator linked the two levels. In the early market years, warehousemen used basements to store and order farmers' tobacco as well as to shelter horse and mule stables. When these uses declined, basements became storage areas for leaf purchased by the warehouse. On each level, large posts held up the construction and provided open spaces for movement of vehicles inside the building. Brick walls from twelve to sixteen inches thick enclosed the warehouse. Local brick maker Silas Lucas supplied the brick for the early warehouse construction in Wilson. Numerous skylights built into tin roofs supplied tobacco buyers with sufficient lighting. Typical of tobacco warehouse construction at the turn of the century, the Banner had six arched doors on its front, some for entrance and exit and others built for loading. Doors on other sides were less elaborate.[24] The Banner had an office, a camp room for farmers, a restaurant, and a refreshment stand often frequented by nearby school students. Proprietors of the Banner advertised their new warehouse construction in an 1899 letter to attract patrons:

> In building of the Banner no money or pains has been spared to make it in all respects the peer of any house in the State as to lights, ventilation and all other points essential to the comfort of both man and beast.[25]

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[24] Ibid., 42-47; Gold, "Town Named Wilson," 73.

[25] Clark, "Reflections," 45, 54.

Warehousemen knew the need to attract farmers' business and used various methods to do so. Early warehousemen employed drummers who went from farm to farm in hopes of persuading tobacco producers to sell with their business. By the turn of the century, warehouse advertisement covered rocks, fences, barns, and the warehouses themselves. The Centre Brick warehouse displayed its logo in raised brick work, but the Banner had painted lettering with its name and advertisements: "The Home of High Prices," and "If There Is Any Place Better Nobody Has Found It."[26]

Warehousemen advertised with handbills, on billboards, and eventually through automobile stickers and the radio. Jonathan Daniels described the advertising styles in eastern North Carolina around 1940:

> On all the highways are huge billboards advising the farmer to sell his tobacco in the Suchandsuch tobacco market which always gives a square deal and high prices. Each market town insists that it gives the squarest deal and the highest prices. All of them say it in the newspapers and over the radio. "High dollar and hospitality. Mr. Farmer, you are welcome."

The Carolina Warehouse in Wilson sponsored the "Mustard and Gravy" radio show in the 1930s. The program provided advertisement for its sponsor while offering popular entertainment with local talent. Many eastern North Carolina towns also paid for advertising in hopes of

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[26] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 228-31; Clark, "Reflections," 48, 230.

attracting business. By the 1930s The Wilson Daily Times began an annual "Tobacco Edition" published during harvest season with advertisements and endorsements from local businesses praising the Wilson market.[27]

Warehouse buildings remained for years, but often changed operators and proprietors. An exception was the Centre Brick Warehouse which was owned by the same family over ninety years. Although some aspects of modernization crept into the warehouse businesses, the buildings remained exempt from major changes. Warehousemen enlarged practically all the early warehouses through the years as tobacco sales increased. Some became storage facilities for tobacco processing plants as selling needs changed. In the off-season, warehouses provided shelter for reunions of Civil War veterans, dances, and even a high school graduation in 1934.[28]

The early warehouse investors of Wilson represented established families of the county. Several of them were already producing tobacco by 1890 and desired a local warehouse to market their crop. Calvin Barnes, Captain Frank W. Barnes, L. F. Lucas, and James Rountree were early Wilson County tobacco planters who had been

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[27] Daniels, Tar Heels, 86; Clark, "Reflections," 230-31; The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 31, 1933.

[28] Clark, "Reflections," 12, 207, 538, 587, 638, 766, 824; The Wilson Daily Times, Oct. 4, 1989.

marketing their crop in distant areas of North Carolina. These planters joined with other stockholders in 1890 to form the Wilson Warehouse Company and operate Wilson's first warehouse.[29]

Among these older investors were some youthful entrepreneurs. Brothers James E. Woodard and David Warren Woodard were stockholders in the Wilson Warehouse, and their oldest brother Walter F. Woodard was a member of the board of directors. All three, born between 1865 and 1869, were in their twenties when they began their warehouse involvements. Their father, Warren Woodard, was a large landowner in Wilson County and possibly helped to finance his sons in their warehouse investments.[30]

Although the investors were local men, the opening of the Wilson market provided opportunities for newcomers with experience in tobacco marketing. The directors of the Wilson Warehouse had the foresight to hire Captain Ed. Pace to manage the first market. Pace, born in 1836, had experience in both Virginia and North Carolina tobacco sales and provided the stability and expertise necessary to promote and organize the first Wilson auction system. Two other employees of the Wilson Tobacco Warehouse were Ula H. Cozart and Tom Washington. Both came from the Oxford Tobacco Market in Granville County, an area well-

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[29] Clark, "Reflections," 720.

[30] Ibid.; Ohno, Architectural Heritage, 119.

known for successful tobacco men. They had limited experience, yet held responsible positions. Twenty-one year-old Cozart was sales manager, and Washington, at twenty-five, was the auctioneer. The age differences between Pace and his two employees created conflicts, and both Washington and Cozart left the Wilson Warehouse after one sales season.[31]

Investors dissolved the Wilson Warehouse Company by 1893, but Walter, James, and David Woodard took over the property, renaming it Woodard Warehouse. The young entrepreneurs remodeled and expanded the wooden structure in 1894-95, creating a brick-walled building similar to others being built in Wilson by that year. Captain Pace remained as manager with the Woodard organization, but he was replaced with younger operators after the 1895 season. Sidney Bobbitt became the Woodard Warehouse operator in 1896-1899. Bobbitt came from the Oxford tobacco market and was a close friend of U. H. Cozart. Brothers Will and Selby Anderson came to Wilson with their father from Virginia in 1891 to open the Planters Warehouse. They were both still in their twenties when they began operation of the Woodard Warehouse in 1899. By 1906 the Woodards had other investments, and they closed their warehouse business. The brothers maintained farming

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[31] Clark, "Reflections," 726-29; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 148.

operations, business and civic duties for years to come. All three Woodard brothers built ample homes in town between 1898-1927 in an area known as Woodard Circle on Goldsboro Street.[32]

Shortly after the Woodard Warehouse began operation, other investors organized competing auction houses. In 1891 the Planters Warehouse opened under the management of Thomas M. Anderson, and by 1893 former Wilson Warehouse employees, Captain Tom Washington and U. H. Cozart operated the Centre Brick Warehouse. Both men had worked on the Durham Market for two years before returning to Wilson in 1893. Washington and Cozart opened the Centre Brick Warehouse on Goldsboro Street in a one floor brick building built by Calvin Barnes, but later enlarged the structure. In 1896 The Wilson Advance claimed that the Centre Brick was the largest tobacco warehouse in North Carolina.[33]

The original proprietors of the Centre Brick Warehouse became some of the most successful warehousemen in Wilson's New South tobacco culture. All were born in the postbellum era and were new entrepreneurs who migrated to the region with the tobacco industry by the turn of the century. Representing a new leadership in tobacco

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[32] Clark, "Reflections," 733-42, 549-50; Bainbridge, Historic Building Inventory, 147, 149.

[33] Clark, "Reflections," 269-73, 549.

marketing of Wilson County, most of the tobacco warehousemen appear to have been self-made. W. P. Simpson, president of Branch Bank and Company from 1893-96 indicated that:

> Of all the different and various kinds of business we have engaged in the tobacco business is the least satisfactory. It has been impossible, so far as we are concerned, to get the business on any thing like a safe and satisfactory basis. No ware-house-man that we have had the pleasure of dealing with ever had any money of his own, or any security to give for it.[34]

Simpson's observations were based on the early years of the market before the financial successes of warehouse investors. Within a few years many of them married into Wilson families with land and business interests. Their acceptance indicates that the Wilson County elite endorsed the tobacco culture. Many of these youthful warehousemen also became tobacco planters, built impressive homes on Nash Street, and became the Wilson elite themselves by the first years of the twentieth century. Wealthy in property, they sat on university boards and state legislatures, managed tenant farmers, loaned money, and spent long hours in dusty tobacco warehouses and fields, passing the duties on to their offspring.

Tom Washington was a native of Granville County, born in 1862. He was educated beyond the public schools at Knapp of Reeds Academy and Caldwell Institute, and in the 1880s he became a auctioneer on the Oxford Tobacco Market

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[34] Ibid., 864-65.

as well as the Granville County Register-of-Deeds. Washington came to Wilson as the first auctioneer on the tobacco market at the Wilson Warehouse, but remained only one season. After a two-year stay on the Durham market he returned to Wilson with U. H. Cozart to open the Centre Brick Warehouse. With a voice " loud and strong--reminding one of a foxhunt on a cold, crispy morning," Captain Tom Washington made a name for himself as one of Wilson's most colorful auctioneers. His military rank gained from his membership in the Wilson Military Company added to his flair. Health problems ended Washington's auctioning, and he sold his warehouse interests in 1898.[35]

Although no longer in the warehouse business, Washington remained occupied with many other investments in Wilson. He was owner of Wilson Ice and Fuel Company, director of the Wells-Whitehead Cigarette Company, president of the Williams and Palmer Company, and officer of the Farmers Cotton Oil Mill, the General Supply Company, and the D. M. Conner Company, a real estate and insurance establishment. He also had investments in a Morehead City fish meal manufacturing plant. An ardent Democrat, Washington served from 1907-1908 in the North Carolina House and from 1913-17 in the Senate. After his marriage to Nettie Ellis Clark, he also managed his wife's

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[35] Ibid., 276-78.

Saratoga farming operations. In 1925 the Washingtons built an impressive home in the Colonial Revival style at 903 Nash Street where he lived until his death in 1933.[36]

Ula Hubert Cozart arrived on the Wilson Tobacco Market with Washington in 1890. Also from Granville County, he was born in 1869 and worked on the Oxford Market. Both he and Washington slept on cotton bales their first night in Wilson in September 1890. They were accompanied by a servant who stayed awake to protect them from pickpockets. Cozart and Washington spent the next two selling seasons on the Durham market, but returned in 1893 to lease the newly-constructed Centre Brick Warehouse. By 1896 Cozart was elected to the Town Board, serving various terms thereafter. In 1894 he married Ollie Moye, and in 1912 they bought a home at 900 West Nash Street. The home's Classical Revival style with a four-columned two-story portico was a popular Nash Street design of the turn of the century.[37]

Cozart, like Washington, became involved in many civic and business interests in Wilson County through the years. He was a prominent member of the First United Methodist Church at the time of its expansion and building

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[36] Ibid., 278-80; Bainbridge, Historic Buildings Inventory, 190.

[37] Clark, "Reflections," 281-83; Bainbridge, Historic Building Inventory, 30, 69, 190.

program in 1909. Along with Washington, he was an officer in the Wilson Livestock Company and a director of the Wells-Whitehead Cigarette Company. Diversifying his investments, he was president of The Motor Sales Company, selling the Hudson automobile, and by 1919 he was a partner in the Wilson Cotton Gin. During his directorship of Wilson's First National Bank, in 1927 officials constructed a new eight-story building. Cozart bought extensive farmland in Wilson, Greene, Nash, and Wayne Counties. From the Centre Brick Warehouse office, his accountants managed these farms, while Cozart oversaw their operations in person. Cozart died in 1948, and he left his warehouse business to his two sons.[38]

The third partner in the Centre Brick Warehouse also came from outside the county. Joseph Colin Eagles was a native of Crisp, a community in Edgecombe County. Born in 1871, he attended the public schools, Davis Military Academy in LaGrange, and Wake Forest College. Eagles left college life for employment at the Centre Brick in 1893 as office manager and bookkeeper. Around 1899 he bought out Washington and became a partner in the warehouse with U. H. Cozart. In 1909 he married Susie Whitehead Moye, younger sister of Mrs. Cozart. They too built a West Nash Street home. A Classical Revival design similar to the Cozart house down the street, it had a clay tennis court

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[38] Clark, "Reflections," 284-86.

in back by the 1920s. The Eagles family had three children. The two sons became partners in the Centre Brick.[39]

Eagles was a director of Branch Banking and Trust Company and an investor in a mercantile business and Wilson real estate. He also served on the North Carolina Public School Commission and the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina. From 1937-1947 he served in the North Carolina Senate, representing the Wilson district. Through the years, Eagles acquired large acreages of farm land, producing tobacco and other crops. In 1927 he began the Fairfield Dairy Farm in the Stantonsburg vicinity. Eagles died at age eighty-one in 1952.[40]

William Gray Carr was the fourth proprietor of the Centre Brick Warehouse. Born in Greene County in 1866 on the family plantation, Carr became a partner in Centre Brick about 1900. He married Sallie Herring, daughter of Dr. Needham B. Herring, a prominent Wilson physician. The couple built a new home in the Colonial Revival style in 1906 on Whitehead Avenue, one block off Nash Street. Carr was a stockholder and director in the Branch Banking and Trust Company. In addition to real estate in Wilson, Carr

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[39] Ibid., 287-90; Bainbridge, Historic Buildings Inventory, 30.

[40] Clark, "Reflections," 290-91.

continued the family's agricultural pursuits in both Greene and Wilson Counties, growing tobacco and other crops. The Carrs had three children, all who were involved in tobacco warehouses. Carr died in 1930.[41]

The four warehousemen of the Centre Brick provide examples of tobacco warehousemen who made successful careers for themselves and their descendants. The Washingtons did not have children, but the Eagles and Carrs had second generations active in the Centre Brick, and eventually the Cozarts had both second and third generation ownership. Each of the four were typical of the New South economic mobility found in the Wilson Tobacco Market. Although none of the four owners of the Centre Brick had to rise from poverty, there were examples of warehouse owners who come from that background.

William Boyd Clark represents a different type of warehouseman who climbed the economic ladder through the years. He entered the tobacco marketing in Wilson at a later period and worked his way up. Clark was born in 1890, the son of tobacco tenants in Marian County, South Carolina. He had only the public school education offered in the one-room schools of rural South Carolina around the turn of the century. His early tobacco experience came from his tenant farm family. In 1914 Clark had a job

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[41] Ibid., 292-94; Bainbridge, Historic Building Survey, 152.

opportunity to work with the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company in Wilson. After World War I military service, he returned to the Wilson market, and in 1921 he married Bessie L. Spivey, a former Wilson County schoolteacher. The Clarks had four children.[42]

Clark climbed his way up in the warehouse business over the next twenty-five years. He was a tobacco speculator until 1925 when he joined Watson Warehouse as assistant sales manager, then in 1929 he moved to Centre Brick for a similar position. In 1930 Clark became sales manager at Centre Brick #2, then returned to Watson Warehouse in 1931. From 1934-1938 he was a partner in the new Carolina Warehouse. During that time the Clarks built a West Kenan Street home similar in design to the Tom Washington house on Nash Street. Clark continued to operate the Carolina Warehouse until he built his own Clark Warehouse in 1947 on the outer edge of Wilson. Retiring in 1966, Clark transferred the warehouse business to his son Charles Robert Clark. He died in 1972.[43]

While warehouse owners made their mark, the Wilson market provided many other jobs. A lengthy list of warehouse employees carried out necessary tasks: "proprietor, manager, assistant manager, auctioneer, bookkeeper, clip man, floor manager, ticket marker, 'pay

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[42] Clark, "Reflections," 362-63.

[43] Ibid., 363-67.

off,' man, and book carrier." A "lightening calculator" followed the sales to add up the farmers' sums. Also many workers labored for the warehouse and tobacco buying companies to move the tobacco off farmers' vehicles, in and around the warehouse, and on to vehicles going to processing plants. All these workers were seasonal employees.[44]

William Batts had worked at a Wilson warehouse for ten years when a Federal writer interviewed him in June 1939. A black man, as were many of the warehouse laborers, Batts had grown up on a tenant farm, but had faced financial difficulties there. He realized that he had "to figure out a way to make a living without farming." His first "public job" was with the Norfolk and Southern Railroad on the section gang. After a year he found more dependable work driving a dray for the next four years. A job at the wagon factory paid Batts what he had received on the railroad, but when business began to decline Batts had to find other work. The tobacco warehouse paid him $11.88 a week, almost the twelve dollars he received at the wagon factory. That salary remained the same for ten years from 1929-1939.[45]

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[44] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 206; Clark, "Reflections," 580.

[45] Mary H. Hicks, "The Stake of Life," 1939, FWP, SHC, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Batts' job was seasonal, lasting from August to November during the tobacco selling season. He was a packer, a job which involved unloading the farmers' tobacco, placing it in baskets sitting on the low, flat trucks in the warehouse. "I don't know how we got the name, but I rekon de niggers who unloads de tobacco has been named packers since de first warehouse was built." Batts had praise for his job, but he acknowledged that he had difficulty getting used to the tobacco dust and odor when he first began:

> I thought I couldn't stand it and den I knowed I had to because my wife was out of a job and we didn't have nothing to live on. I had worked out by day all de summer but there won't nothing to do out on de farm den. Dat dollar a day I had made all de summer was done spent and no chance of gitting it no more till de spring. I made up my mind dat I had to do it, and I got to liking de work better'n anything.

Batts' working hours at the warehouse were from seven in the morning until six at night. He worked five and a half days a week for the four-month selling season. Saturday was pay day at "twelve sharp."[46]

Batts had to find work when the warehouse closed in November. The first year his wife took in washing and did cooking "when company come to de white folkses'." To supplement her work, Batts made a dollar a day as a day laborer, working through the harvest season in the tobacco crop. Considering all aspects, Batts felt that he did

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[46] Ibid.

well: "I worked about de same hours on de farm I did in de warehouse and I reckon, thinking about de board, I made just as much money." Through the years he continued his farm labor, picking up odd jobs in the winter months digging ditches, sawmilling, clearing new ground, and sawing wood. "I reckon you'd say I ain't got no regular job, but I work pretty regular, 'specially all de months besides December and January."[47]

Each year since Batts began his job on the Wilson Market "de sent me word to come to work." His wife got a job at a local tobacco stemmery, and they rented a house with piped-in water. But Batts and his wife still dreamed of owning their own farm to achieve security:

> What I want to do is buy a little farm and a mule. I think dat is the stake of life. If I had dat little farm I'd have a home and I'd know dat I could grub our living out of de ground somehow. As it is, we just live in a rented house and stay scared to death dat I'll get sick or not be took back on at de warehouse in de fall. If I had de farm I could gather my crop mostly before time to work at de warehouse.[48]

In most cases regardless of their position, warehouse employees had to find other employment for many months. Warehouse proprietors had other investments in urban businesses and rural agriculture. Many workers, especially auctioneers and buyers, followed other tobacco markets for six months of the year. At the close of the

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

markets, they returned to manage farms, sell insurance, or work at various short-term jobs. Employees such as William Batts also "picked up" work on even shorter terms in order to go back to the warehouse in the fall.[49]

The Wilson Tobacco Market, its auction system, and its workers became significant aspects of the New South tobacco culture in Wilson County after 1890. The market, supported by local business and the community, provided a business boom for New South Coastal Plain towns in eastern North Carolina. Just as Piedmont North Carolina supported textile mills, the Coastal Plain welcomed tobacco markets and the economic activity they generated. Advertisements and festivals grew along with the warehouses to entice business and boost the economy.

For warehouse operators, the market provided opportunities for economic and social mobility. Youthful postwar tobacco men became leaders in local and state politics, churches, and businesses as they rose in the warehouse trade. Their Nash Street homes represented their successes. Tobacco auctioneers, bookkeepers and sales managers built on the streets branching off Nash and became the middle class of Wilson. These workers also became a part of the community and invested in farm and business interests, some of them acquiring their own warehouses. Tobacco market money educated their children,

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[49] Clark, "Reflections," 239, 600.

many of whom entered the profession in the third generation.

For many warehouse laborers, the tobacco market was another part-time job to fill out an annual work schedule of farm labor and only reinforced the gaps in the agricultural economy of Wilson County. To William Batts, who went to the warehouse after losing his job at the wagon factory, the seasonal schedule of the tobacco auction system became an immediate opportunity for work when he had no other choices. During the Depression years, he hoped to be rehired each fall after his day labor on area farms ended.

For low income laborers who would have been unemployed in the fall months, warehouse jobs offered additional income opportunities. Farm workers could move from the field to the warehouse in September with little conflict. This labor schedule was equally beneficial for tobacco producers and warehousemen. Planters were not deprived of labor needed for production and harvest, and warehousemen gained short-term workers for the selling season. Yet the seasonal nature of warehouse employment kept many Wilson County workers in patterns of temporary low-wage jobs in order to make living expenses. For those who worked as the Batts family, tobacco warehouse jobs could only "string" them along with temporary work, making them dream of the day when they might own a farm.

CHAPTER 5

TOBACCO FACTORIES

New South boosters in eastern North Carolina realized that diversification of crop production and marketing needed processing and manufacturing in order to complete a lasting tobacco culture. Facilities for tobacco processing and manufacturing meant that communities could lessen the southern dependency on other areas and benefit from economic aspects of production and manufacturing. For Wilson County tobacco promoters who had seen tobacco's economic benefits in Winston-Salem, Durham, and other Piedmont towns, the tobacco factories represented hope for economic success in the Coastal Plain.

From the beginning of plans to develop a tobacco market in January 1890, newspaper editor Charles Daniels envisioned tobacco factories in Wilson:

> We learn that several tobacco dealers have already proposed building prize houses here, if we get a tobacco market. The probabilities are that we would get several factories if we would make this a good tobacco market. Our people are united--they are in earnest and a tobacco market is what Wilson will be in the not far distant future.

Aware of the success of Henderson as a tobacco town with its market auction system and accompanying tobacco drying facilities, local town leaders in Wilson provided free building sites and eliminated taxes for prize houses.[1]

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[1] The Wilson Advance, Jan. 23, 1890.

Since tobacco sold by weight, farmers wanted the cured leaf to contain as much moisture as possible at warehouse sales. In order to prevent leaf deterioration, buyers had to redry the tobacco to a 10 percent moisture level before "prizing" it into hogsheads for storage and shipment. Early prize house operators dried their tobacco by hanging it on sticks for eight to ten months. During that time workers eliminated leaf moisture by tossing tobacco on the floor and moving it around with pitchforks. These time-consuming drying methods often slowed tobacco sales on the auction market, since buyers could only purchase amounts of tobacco that could be processed in a reasonable time. Once the tobacco was thoroughly dry, workers had to await the proper humidity levels so that the leaf would not shatter when packed in hogsheads. Compacting the leaves into hogsheads at small prize houses involved use of a pressure plate operated by a manual lever. Larger manufacturing companies used a steam press or hydraulic cylinder.[2]

The tobacco prize house was the primary stage in leaf processing, offering local businessmen an opportunity to speculate in the tobacco culture with limited investments and machinery. Between 1890-1897 a total of eighteen prizeries operated in Wilson, most developed by local

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[2] Clark, "Processing Plants," 24; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 309-10.

businessmen. A number of them were in operation in the first year of the Wilson market, indicating that their owners made construction plans paralleling the organization of the auction system. Most Wilson prizeries were multi-storied buildings built of brick. Brick construction reduced fire hazards, and space was a necessary requirement for sorting, drying, and prizing purchased leaf.[3]

Local Wilson County planters were the among the first investors in tobacco prizeries. Along with development of a tobacco warehouse in 1890, the Wilson Tobacco Company operated a prize house to prepare the purchased tobacco for storage and sale. Many of the company stockholders were planting bright tobacco and wanted to provide the local market with the necessary prizing facilities to attract leaf buyers. When investors dissolved the Wilson Tobacco Company in 1892, the planter brothers Walter, David, and James Woodard purchased both its warehouse and the prizery, a building 150 feet long and three-and-a-half stories high. Sometime between 1893-1897 the Woodard brothers also invested in two other prizeries.[4]

The Woodard brothers had competition from other county planters in the construction of prize houses. James T. Wiggins, planter, mill and store owner, and

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[3] Clark, "Processing Plants," 32.

[4] Ibid., 22-25.

lumberman, opened two prizeries around 1890. Wiggins had been one of the first bright leaf tobacco planters in Wilson County in the 1870s. In a similar circumstance, Alexander Green, also an early tobacco planter, built a two-story brick prizery in the heart of the warehouse district between 1890-1897. During those same years, Wilson merchant and farm and gin owner Thomas Hadley also operated a prizery in Wilson. Wilson planters were as important to the development of tobacco processing as they were to the area's marketing.[5]

Other prize house owners were local businessmen. Alpheus Branch had operated a mercantile business with Hadley and by 1890 was the principal owner of the Wilson Cotton Mills and Branch Banking Company. He and Roscoe Briggs built a prizery between 1890-1893. Briggs was the son of the owner of the Briggs Hotel on East Nash Street. After the death of Branch in 1893, Briggs invested in a prizery with Charles M. Fleming. Fleming, born in 1862 in Warren County, North Carolina, learned the tobacco trade on the Oxford market before his 1890 move to Wilson. He became known as the "Grandfather of the Wilson Tobacco Market" for his purchase of the first tobacco sold on the market in 1890.[6]

Local leaf dealers were soon competing against the

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[5] Ibid., 10-12, 21.

[6] Ibid., 3-6; The Wilson Daily Times, Jan. 10, 1950.

Tobacco Trust for leaf purchases. With the opening of the market, Julius G. Roney came to Wilson as manager in charge of the leaf and buying operation of the American Tobacco Company. Roney had been in tobacco buying and processing in Durham, and in Wilson he became well-known through Edmund Pace's "Tobacco Leaf" newspaper articles. With Roney's management in the 1890s the American Tobacco Company leased prizeries from local businessmen in Wilson, handling its own tobacco purchasing and redrying rather than buying through local dealers with prizeries.[7]

James B. Duke organized the Tobacco Trust the year before the opening of the Wilson market. In 1889 five major cigarette manufacturers joined to become the American Tobacco Company with Duke as president. The W. Duke, Sons and Company had already undercut other cigarette manufacturers by utilizing labor efficient machinery and an aggressive advertising campaign in the 1880s. Realizing that competition with the Dukes was a losing battle, Allen and Ginter, F. S. Kinney Company, W. S. Kimball, and Goodwin and Company joined the Dukes under the "Tobacco Trust." The Trust held great economic power in areas of tobacco buying, processing, and manufacturing, continuing to eliminate competition in those areas during the 1890s. By 1900 the Trust took over numerous plug

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[7] Clark, "Processing Plants," 29-32; Anniversary Committee, History of Wilson County, 346.

tobacco companies, including Liggett and Myers and R.J. Reynolds. In 1904 both the Consolidated Tobacco Company and the Continental Tobacco Company merged with the American Tobacco Company. By 1908 the Tobacco Trust held assets worth $325 million.[8]

The presence of the Tobacco Trust in Wilson encouraged hope for further expansion of tobacco factories. In September 1890 Henry Blount, editor of the Wilson Mirror, tallied the tobacco sales at "the neat little sum of eight thousand six hundred and thirty seven dollars and thirty-four cents." With a successful tobacco market and accompanying prize houses, Blount encouraged Wilson businessmen to move to the next step in tobacco industry, the manufacture of the finished product:

> Having struck the bonanza, friends, do not let the opportunity slip, but utilize the advantages we have, in having the raw material right at our doors, by at once pushing the enterprises already started for manufacturing the weed into smoking tobacco and cigarettes. A representative of the great American Tobacco Company whose chief aim is the manufacture of cigarette and smoking tobacco says if there is a million and half pounds of tobacco sold in Wilson he will buy one million. This shows the estimate put upon the grade of tobacco made in this section. If it can be bought and carried to New York and Durham and Winston and Danville for manufacture, why cannot our own capitalists make money and big money too by manufacturing the article right here? Friends it must be done. We must not let the opportunity slip; begin with the tide as it is rising when property may be bought cheaply in accessible points and start at once

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[8] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco, 569-79; Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 22-24, 33-36.

at the erection of factory buildings.[9]

The earliest indications of plans for cigarette production came in July of 1894 when editors of The Wilson Advance announced that Whitley Kincaid planned to convert eight rooms in the Corbett Hotel building as a manufacturing facility for smoking tobacco and cigarettes:

> The "Wilson Star" brand of cigarettes will be manufactured. The tobacco used in making these cigarettes is three years old. We are glad to see such push and enterprise on the part of Mr. Kincaid and we bespeak for him a liberal patronage. It is just this kind of enterprise that will build up Wilson.[10]

Kincaid's factory never materialized, but by 1900 there were further attempts to produce cigarettes in the old Corbett Hotel. After interior alterations that year, the Wells-Whitehead Tobacco Company began manufacture of cigarettes in the newly-purchased hotel property. Located on the railroad, the brick building offered ample space and a suitable location for shipping its products. The stockholders already had experience in either tobacco production or sales and hoped to extend their investments into the factory stage of Wilson's tobacco culture.[11]

H. G. Whitehead, then twenty-six years old, became president of the Wells-Whitehead Tobacco Company. He was

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[9] The Wilson Mirror, Sept. 17, 24, 1890.

[10] The Wilson Advance, July 26, 1894.

[11] Clark, "Processing Plants," 140; Bainbridge, Historic Buildings Inventory, 96.

the son of Captain Howell Gray Whitehead, large planter of the White Oak Plantation near Saratoga, who had moved to Wilson in 1872, purchased a large home on Nash Street, and had been an stockholder in the Wilson Cotton Mill. The younger Whitehead expanded his father's investments into Wilson's new tobacco industry. Other members of the board of directors were tobacco warehousemen and prizery owners: Will P Anderson once managed the Woodard Brothers Tobacco Warehouse; Ula H. Cozart owned and managed the Centre Brick Warehouse; Tom Washington, a former tobacco auctioneer and warehouse owner, was a successful Wilson businessman; Charles Fleming and Roscoe Briggs were tobacco prizery owners. Employed as salesmen were W. P. Anderson, W. M. Carter, and Frank Ware. Carter had been in Wilson since the opening of the market in 1890 as a leaf dealer, and Ware had invested in a cigarette factory in Thomasville, North Carolina at an earlier date.[12]

Whitehead attempted to staff the new plant with qualified management. In 1900 he met Rupert C. Welfare who was then employed as a manager of the Brown Brothers cigarette plant in Winston-Salem. Welfare was a successful inventor in the tobacco industry with patents

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[12] Clark, "Processing Plants," 140; Clark, "Reflections," 69, 71-72; Charles B. McLean, "Early Cigarette Manufacturing in Wilson," in Johnston, "Bits of Wilson History."

on certain parts used in cigarette making machines and also had helped develop a cigarette paper paste. Whitehead hired Welfare to manage the Wilson factory.[13]

There are indications that the establishment of the Wells-Whitehead Tobacco Company was not totally a local business venture, but "sponsored by Richmond capital" in an attempt to resist the monopoly of the Tobacco Trust in cigarette production and sales. The Wells-Whitehead Company manufactured the cigarette brand "Carolina Brights," a name referring to the bright tobacco culture developing in the Wilson area. The company advertized the brand as "an independent cigarette that is an unqualified success," disassociating it from the Trust. Carolina Brights were successful, but as early as 1901 reports leaked that officials were negotiating a sale of the company. In 1903, 51 percent of the Wells-Whitehead Tobacco Company sold for $103,000 to the Durham Tobacco Company, a subsidiary of the American Tobacco Company.[14]

The Tobacco Trust used various tactics to pressure the small company to sell and then to conceal the purchase. The American Tobacco Company tried to undercut the price of the Carolina Brights by reducing the cost of its own American Beauties in North Carolina. When their

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[13] Ibid., Clark, "Reflections," 70.

[14] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 604; Clark, "Processing Plants," 141.

efforts were unsuccessful in forcing a sale, the Trust sabotaged production of the Wells-Whitehead Company. As the story goes, when the Wells-Whitehead officials resisted a buy-out, the Tobacco Trust placed an agent on the production line of the Carolina Brights who purposefully allowed moisture into the cigarette packages. Not detected until sold to consumers, the cigarettes molded in the packages, causing consumers to shun the company's product and forcing the company to sell to the Trust. Concealing the Trust ownership for three years, the American Tobacco Company retained H. G. Whitehead as president and allowed the company to remain as an independent. As a part of the Tobacco Trust in 1906, the Wells-Whitehead Tobacco Company produced 92,000,000 Carolina Brights.[15]

A few years after the beginning of the company, W. N. Carter left Wells-Whitehead as a salesman and began the Carter Cigarette Company in Wilson. Carter's company produced the Contentnea brand, the name derived from Contentnea Creek in Wilson County. As an advertisement in each package, Carter used a picture of Benjamin Thompson, a Wilson County planter and Civil War veteran, dressed as Uncle Sam. Within a few years Carter sold the company to

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[15] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 604-5; Clark, "Processing Plants," 142-43; McLean, "Cigarette Manufacturing in Wilson."

stockholder Ernest Nadal, and the Irwin-Nadal Cigarette Company continued to produce the Contentnea brand until 1912. This company also struggled to resist the American Tobacco Company's power.[16]

Two other employees of the Wells-Whitehead Tobacco Company began the Ware-Kramer Tobacco Company in 1904 and manufactured the White Roll brand of cigarettes. The new company operated in Wilson in competition with the American Tobacco Company's Wells-Whitehead product, Carolina Brights. After the British-American Tobacco Company took over the export trade of the Tobacco Trust, officials attempted to use Wells-Whitehead employees as informants to eliminate Ware-Kramer's foreign trade to China. Finally bowing to economic pressure, in 1906 officials moved Ware-Kramer to Norfolk, Virginia, and began a series of lawsuits against the Tobacco Trust for forcing it out of business. A 1911 suit sought $2,400,000 from the American Tobacco Company and charged that the Trust attempted to destroy Ware-Kramer and other small manufacturers. Ware-Kramer won the litigation but received only $70,000 in damages. Within six months Ware filed for bankruptcy and became an employee of the

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[16] Clark, "Processing Plants," 130-31; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 606.

American Tobacco Company.[17]

Tilley uses the Ware-Kramer conflict as an example of the fickleness of public opinion toward the American Tobacco Company and trusts in general. Even though public opinion resisted the nature of big business monopolies, they realized that the American Tobacco Company held a position in the tobacco industry which small companies could not replicate.[18]

Attempts at cigarette manufacture in Wilson ended in the 1910s. Although the Trust dissolved in 1911, the resulting companies were well-established in tobacco marketing and processing, having efficient equipment and modern facilities. It may not have been realistic for small tobacco manufacturers to have expected to survive in the business for long. Even before 1900 there were signs that tobacco prizeries could not economically keep pace with bigger companies. Sophisticated tobacco processing equipment had developed in the 1890s, widening the gap between locally owned prizeries and tobacco redrying plants run by well-established companies.

The development of mechanical tobacco dryers and presses by the late 1890s changed the practicality of small-scale investment in tobacco redrying. While early

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[17] McLean, "Cigarette Manufacturing in Wilson;" Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 605.

[18] Ibid., 606.

prizery owners could begin operations with minimal equipment and labor and still remain competitive, the perfection of effective but expensive machinery required a further level of investment. In Wilson by 1897 most of the locally-owned tobacco prizeries had either closed or had evolved into more sophisticated redrying facilities. By that year the American Tobacco Company operated the Branch-Briggs prizery and two other Wilson facilities as redrying plants. Around 1903 the company built its own redrying facility.[19]

The transition toward new redrying equipment was best represented by the Procter machine of 1897. Josiah K. Procter had designed textile machinery for twenty years when he applied his techniques for drying cloth to tobacco. His resulting "stick machine" was a steel rack capable of holding five tiers of tobacco on sticks. The rack fit into a enclosed dryer similar to Procter's previous cloth drying machine. The same rack could be pushed out of the dryer to a cooling chamber, then later to an ordering chamber before workers packed the leaf into hogsheads. By circulating air in an enclosed compartment, Procter's drying machine shortened the redrying process to forty-five minutes, saved energy, and increased floor space for unprocessed tobacco. As the drying machine

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[19] Clark, "Processing Plants," 3, 29-30; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 315.

evolved, a moving belt replaced the movable racks, further reducing labor.[20]

By 1922 Procter's machine was "house-like" with a daily capacity of 150,000 pounds of tobacco in many redrying plants. Costs for the Procter machine doubled between 1900-1929, but overall production costs declined. The success of the machine and reduction of drying time affected all levels of the tobacco industry. Processors were able to move purchased leaf quickly from warehouses through the drying process to storage and avoid leaf damage from mold or fire. Because processing moved efficiently, warehousemen could schedule frequent sales, and farmers could market their tobacco soon after curing, thus reducing the possibility of damaged leaf for them also.[21]

By the early century, large leaf dealers and manufacturers opened redrying facilities close to tobacco markets in order to move the leaf immediately to processing plants. The establishment of redrying plants placed Wilson a step closer to the New South tobacco factories of the Piedmont towns of Durham and Winston-Salem. Redrying plants required extensive investment in both labor and machinery needed to achieve the necessary moisture levels in tobacco processing. Coal-fired boilers

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[20] Ibid., 313-14.

[21] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 314-15.

produced steam necessary to dry the leaf, thus redrying plants needed large brick stacks to vent the smoke. With the absence of tobacco manufacturing, the smoke stacks of tobacco processing plants symbolized Wilson's New South industrialization.[22]

A 1939 study by Ben Lemert for the National Youth Administration of North Carolina indicated that tobacco processing methods had changed little since the introduction of machinery around the turn of the century. After leaf buyers purchased the tobacco, laborers loaded it onto company vehicles for transport to redrying plants. At the plant workers reweighed the tobacco, storing it in the receiving room until similar grades had accumulated. After regrading according to company standards, workers transferred the leaf to the hang and blending room. There workers working with separate grades hung the tied tobacco on sticks as it moved on a conveyor belt. Once each stick had passed by all the workers, it held a blend of different grades. During the blending process, workers and machinery cleansed the tobacco of sand and foreign matter.[23]

After the blending and cleansing stages, workers

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[22] Ibid., 314; Clark, "Processing Plants," 27-28.

[23] Ben F. Lemert, The Tobacco Manufacturing Industry in North Carolina (Raleigh: National Youth Administration of North Carolina, 1939), 14.

placed the tobacco on a conveyor chain to carry it into the drying machine. An hour-long process thoroughly dried the tobacco with heat, cooled it to room temperature, and then steamed it to inject enough moisture to make the tobacco pliable. As the dried tobacco came out of the dryer, packers placed the tobacco in hogsheads. Other workers moved the full hogshead to a hydraulic press to compact the leaf before sealing the container. After weighing and labeling the hogshead, workers sent it to a storage warehouse until shipment to manufacturers.[24]

Since some tobacco manufacturers desired stemmed tobacco, redrying plants employed workers to separate the stem from the leaf. Although manufacturing companies used stemming machines, workers in most North Carolina redrying plants stemmed tobacco by hand as late as 1939. To keep the leaf from shattering, an ordering machine supplied enough moisture in the tobacco to make it pliable. Belts carried tobacco to workers arranged along each side of tables where they manually stripped the stem from the leaf. After cleansed of dirt, the strips dried on a wire screen in the drying machine for thirty to forty-five minutes. Workers then packed the dry strips into hogsheads for storage. Redrying plants maintained records of their tobacco in storage with its type, grade, age, and location. Samples of tobacco grades remained available to

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[24] Ibid., 15.

ship to perspective buyers upon request.[25]

Leaf dealers and tobacco manufacturers established twenty redrying plants in Wilson County between 1890-1930. Some lasted only a few years, then were bought out by others. By 1942 five independent leaf processors remained in Wilson: W. T. Clark and Company, R. P. Watson Tobacco Company, Wilson Tobacco Company, James I. Miller Tobacco Company, and E. J. O'Brien and Company. A sixth, Whitehead and Anderson Tobacco Company, had Wilson offices but a redrying plant located in Lumberton, North Carolina.[26]

For most of the early investors, the era of prizeries in Wilson was short-lived, but two leaf dealers transformed their businesses from prize houses to redrying plants. Beginning in 1895 the R. P. Watson Tobacco Company operated a Wilson prizery, but expanded its facilities by 1908 with necessary redrying equipment. R. P. Watson came to Wilson from Henderson and began work as a leaf dealer, prizing tobacco to resell to manufacturers. Two of his sons joined the company by the 1930s and continued the company after their father's death in 1932. During that decade the company maintained another redrying plant in Valdosta, Georgia, but consolidated it with the

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[25] Ibid., 15-16.

[26] Clark, "Processing Plants," 32-33, 142; The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 21, 1942.

Wilson plant in the 1940s.[27]

Another leaf dealer, William Thomas Clark, came to Wilson from Virginia and the Danville Tobacco Market in the 1890s. Clark used the Woodard Brothers Warehouse Company prizery and converted it into a redrying facility in 1897. By 1916 he had purchased the Liberty Warehouse property, also converting it to a redrying facility and enlarging it in 1920. The W. T. Clark Tobacco Company operated on a small scale in Wilson, but sent buyers to other markets and maintained overseas customers. On the Wilson market the company bought and processed for domestic tobacco companies. The company continued after Clark's death in 1939, managed by family members.[28]

Between 1903-1908 Dibrell Brothers Tobacco Company acquired the S. W. Venable Company in Wilson. Both companies were well-established leaf dealerships from Virginia which had expanded into North Carolina with the bright tobacco markets. In Wilson the Venable Company had a prizery in the mid 1890s and a redrying plant by 1903. Dibrell Brothers was an aggressive leaf dealer with a pattern of mergers beginning in the 1870s. A partnership with a member of the Venable family in 1891 led to the

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[27] Ibid., Jan. 10, 1950; Clark, "Tobacco Processing," 117-19.

[28] The Wilson Daily Times, Jan. 10, 1950; Clark, "Tobacco Processing," 42-45.

merger with the S. W. Venable Company in the early century. By 1916 the company's redrying facilities became known as the Wilson Tobacco Company. In spite of the name change, the link to the Dibrell company remained. Dibrell Brothers was an example of the consolidation of leaf companies during the 1890-1920 period. The most successful survivors were those which absorbed competitors or merged when necessary in an effort to compete with the Tobacco Trust.[29]

The James I. Miller Tobacco Company began in 1923 in Henderson and employed tobacco buyers on the Wilson market by 1924. In 1929 the company moved to Wilson with the encouragement from warehousemen U. H. Cozart, Joe Eagles, H.G. Whitehead, S. H. Anderson , and J. E. Crute. Modifying the Tri-State Tobacco Cooperative warehouse, the company joined with a British leaf dealer under the name Southern Tobacco Company of Wilson. That partnership dissolved in 1939, and the Wilson company again used the James I. Miller logo. During the 1930s the company also maintained an office in Shanghai, China.[30]

The E. J. O'Brien Tobacco Company was the last tobacco processing company established in Wilson until the 1960s. The O'Brien Tobacco Company took over the redrying

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[29] Ibid., 15, 49, 123-25; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 277-80.

[30] Clark, "Processing Plants," 85-87.

facilities of the earlier Monk-Adams Tobacco Company around 1930. The company modernized the building during the next decade, and in the 1940s it operated as Standard Redryers Tobacco Company.[31]

By 1942 there were also five national manufacturing companies with processing plants in Wilson: Imperial Tobacco Company, American Suppliers, Inc., Liggett and Myers, Export Leaf Tobacco Company, and R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. All were reflective of the rise and fall of the Tobacco Trust from 1889-1911.

British companies combined to form the Imperial Tobacco Company in 1901 to resist encroachment of the American Tobacco Company on British sales. After Imperial threatened to sell tobacco products on the American markets, the Trust agreed to stay out of British sales. Through further cooperation, the two companies organized the British-American Tobacco Company, Ltd. to carry out tobacco sales for both companies outside the United States and Britain. After this agreement, Imperial consolidated its leaf purchase and processing by organizing its own redrying plants in the United States. In 1902 the company purchased the three-story brick redrying facility in Wilson owned by Charles M. Fleming. Since his early years in the Briggs-Fleming prizery, Fleming had purchased tobacco on the Wilson market for British firms. In May

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[31] Ibid., 97.

1897 Fleming built the redrying facility purchased by Imperial. After the sale, Fleming became Imperial's branch manager in Wilson until his death in 1931.[32]

The other tobacco companies operating in Wilson developed from the dissolution of the American Tobacco Company in 1911. Anti-trust legislation in North Carolina spurred litigations against the Trust as early as the 1890s, and subsequent suits in various other states continued attacks for restrictions of trade. Legal attempts were ineffective in restraining the monopoly until the United States Supreme Court decision in 1911 dissolved the Tobacco Trust based on the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890. The decision reduced the American Tobacco Company by dividing its assets and business among fifteen other tobacco companies. Four major tobacco companies led by former Trust executives emerged from the dissolution: the American Tobacco Company, R.J. Reynolds, Liggett and Myers, and P. Lorillard.[33]

The elimination of the Trust was evident in the new processing companies in Wilson after 1911. With the end of the Trust, the new American Tobacco Company purchased its leaf through a separate subsidiary, American Suppliers Company. In Wilson, American Suppliers bought tobacco on

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[32] Ibid., 5-6, 69-72; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 331.

[33] Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 59-66.

the local market and processed it for shipment to the American Tobacco Company, using storage facilities which had been a part of the Wilson Tobacco Company. Apparently the dissolution agreement awarded Liggett and Myers the Wilson facilities formerly used by the American Tobacco Company.[34]

Also separated from the Trust, the Imperial Tobacco Company gained a share of the assets and business of the American Tobacco Company in the 1911 court decision. Prior to 1911, the British-American Tobacco Company purchased leaf intended for export for itself and Imperial. As a method of ending the Trust monopoly, common leaf purchasing ceased. Thereafter Imperial had to purchase its own tobacco and the newly-formed Export Leaf Tobacco Company bought leaf for the British-American Tobacco Company. Export Leaf was a subsidiary of the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company owned by British-American. In Wilson, Export Leaf used the Farmers' Warehouse from 1911-1913 as a prizing plant. By 1916 the company operated a redrying plant and in 1923 purchased a second facility for expansion.[35]

Although the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company

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[34] Ibid., 60-64, 327; Clark, "Processing Plants," 31, 78.

[35] Tennant, Cigarette Industry, 207; Clark, "Processing Plants," 59.

maintained limited independence under the Trust, the company became fully independent after the 1911 court decision. The company located a redrying plant in Wilson in 1922 to be near tobacco sales in the New Belt. For a while the Wilson plant redried tobacco, but when Reynolds expanded its Winston-Salem facilities, its Wilson plant only "green-prized" purchased leaf into hogsheads and shipped it to Winston for redrying.[36]

Tobacco processing companies became major employers in Wilson County. In 1928 both the W. T. Clark and R. P. Watson companies employed 250-300 "hands" during the processing season, and Imperial hired between 500-700 of the seasonal workers. Tilley emphasized that "with the exception of a foreman, operators of redrying machines, and a few other mechanics, the work of the redrying plant fell to the Negroes." Of the 539 "gainful workers" in tobacco factories in Wilson County listed in the 1930 census, 455 were black.[37]

A tradition of black workers in tobacco factories began in the antebellum years in North Carolina. Slaves

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[36] Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 60, 68; Clark, "Processing Plants," 101-2.

[37] C. E. Weaver, compiler, Sketches of Wilson, North Carolina, U.S.A. (Richmond, Va.: Central Publishing Co., Inc., 1928), 8; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 318; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census: 1930 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), 386.

in the Winston-Salem area gained a certain autonomy by hiring out to work in early tobacco factories. By the emergence of the cigarette industry in postbellum Wilson County, many freed blacks already had left the farms for the towns and cities and their labor was readily available for modest wages. An urban black population concentrated in the town of Wilson after the war, but there was also a large black agricultural population available for work in the months of September to May. Tobacco factory work did not begin until the end of the tobacco harvest and ended in time to transplant the crop.[38]

The majority of factory workers were women who lived in the vicinity of the plant and sought the better wages paid in tobacco processing. The work was demanding during the season, with ten-hour days and five-and-a-half-day weeks, lasting from September to May. Despite the long hours and seasonal schedule, workers in need of jobs often found that tobacco factory employment offered the highest salaries around for unskilled employment. For black women the other job alternatives were scarce, and domestic work provided fewer hours and less pay. Warehouse worker William Batts expressed the importance of his wife's job

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[38] Robert Rodgers Korstad, "Daybreak of Freedom: Tobacco Workers and the CIO, Winston Salem, North Carolina, 1943-1950" (Ph.D. diss., The Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1987), 52-53; History Book Committee, Wilson, North Carolina, 23.

in a local stemmery in 1939 Wilson:

> My wife got her job stemming tobacco eight years ago, and she works pretty regular. Her money we live on just like we does mine. She stems tobacco by de pound and she generally makes around $8 a week. It looks like we ought to save some but we ain't. We had to buy some furniture and clothes and keep up our life insurance and our rent and lights.

Like many low-wage workers, the family depended on two incomes, yet Batts' wife had high blood pressure, and he feared that her working years might be limited: "I reckon it's just a little time until she'll have to quit her work for good and dat means dat I'll have all of de work to do to keep us going." Batts' own job at the warehouse in the fall had to be supplemented with day labor on farms the rest of the year.[39]

Most of the work at the redrying plants did not require skilled labor, but workers did develop the technique and speed necessary in performing their tasks. Both graders and machine operators had to employ special skills to maintain their jobs. The work was often repetitive and fast-paced, with working conditions dependent upon the foreman. With the power to make wage decisions, the foreman in each department walked the processing lines, keeping the work at an acceptable pace. Some foremen used tactics involving sexual harassment and abusive language. Most black workers concealed their true

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[39] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 320; Hicks, "Stake of Life."

feelings, coping with oppressive white foremen by showing courtesy or playing ignorant.[40]

Tobacco factory wages for seasonal workers were based on the job and production levels. At the early Danville plants in 1898 hangers and pickers made five cents while stemmers made sixty-five cents per hundred pounds of leaf. In 1923 stemmers still were paid on production. At the R. J. Reynolds plant in 1924, the average pay was twenty-eight cents an hour, but blacks and women made less than that. By the 1930s the tobacco industry paid the highest weekly wages among the major North Carolina industries. But high wages in tobacco factories were often misleading. Workers had to meet production quota requirements to receive the minimum wage at the plant. Mrs. Batts made eight dollars a week working in a local Wilson stemmery in 1939. At that wage she was well below the 1938 average weekly North Carolina wage in the tobacco industry of $19.73. The work was seasonal for most workers, yet it lasted long enough to limit them from maintaining little but temporary, low-paying jobs the rest of the year. Although the R. J. Reynolds Company provided retirement benefits for salaried employees, seasonal workers failed

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[40] Lemert, Tobacco Manufacturing, 52; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 321; Korstad, "Daybreak of Freedom," 92-95, 103.

to qualify for them.[41]

White laborers in tobacco factories were in the minority, but they too found that the seasonal aspect of their jobs created financial problems. W. H. Etheridge of Wilson explained his difficulties at a local stemmery in 1939:

> You see, my work at the tobacco factory only lasts about eight months out of the year. During that time I draw a little more than $600. As soon as the tobacco work is over I am laid off till the following August. I always sign up for my social security benefits.

Etheridge had poor health and was unable to do hard labor so he found limited job opportunities to supplement his factory work. The Etheridge family depended on the oldest son's work at a local poolroom and the annual garden to supplement the household income: "We always grow as much garden as we have room for. Our garden here does pretty well, but it's not like we used to have when we lived on a farm."[42]

Etheridge constantly compared his living conditions with his life on the farm because he found town life dependent upon a money economy. As a factory worker he rented his home and had to purchase more goods, and his

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[41] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 320; Korstad, "Daybreak of Freedom," 96-97, 100; Lemert, Tobacco Manufacturing, 53-54.

[42] Stanley Combs, "One of Them Might Be President," 1939, FWP, SHC, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

limited work was not sufficient to keep the family well supplied:

> A poor man like myself hasn't a chance to ever do anything. In my case, I gave up the farm at the age of thirty, and I have lost my farming equipment and working capital. I have a large family, and we can't all get work to do. The bridge is burned behind: I can't go back to the farm.[43]

Etheridge's hopelessness was a contrast to the optimism of the Batts family. Batts and his wife were glad of their job opportunities and hoped to own a farm for even more security. For Batts a farm was "the stake of life." His wife wanted a house of their own which she could fix up without fear of having to move and leave her efforts behind for someone else. "We ain't never had a house like we wanted, and I'm crazy for one of our own dat I can fix and mess over."[44]

In his analysis of New South economy and society, Dwight Billings notes that the North Carolina tobacco industry generally benefitted the black population. In contrast to cotton mills, tobacco processing and manufacturing facilities willingly hired black workers. The availability of jobs in tobacco factory towns for urban blacks aided in the development of "cultural autonomy for the working class." The factory work brought together an urban black population which provided a market

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Hicks, "Stake of Life."

for black businesses.[45]

Although Billings used Durham as his model, Wilson also developed a strong black business community along East Nash Street. For many years the railroad tracks divided Nash Street between the white and black sections in the town of Wilson. Between 1880 and 1930 a self-sufficient community of black homes and businesses comprised a densely populated walking village, meeting the needs of a segregated society in East Wilson. Although white absentee landlords owned much of the real estate, prominent black professionals maintained large homes with impressive architecture. Wilson postmaster S. A. Vick, Dr. Frank Hargrave, undertaker C. L. Darden, and contractor Oliver Nestus Freeman made up part of the East Wilson professional class. East Wilson's leadership organized one of the first black hospitals in North Carolina in 1913 and opened the Charles H. Darden High School for black students in 1923.[46]

Most black inhabitants of East Wilson worked as domestics, delivery men, barbers, teamsters, day laborers, or tobacco factory workers. Since many of the processing

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[45]. Billings, Planters, 118-19.

[46] Bainbridge, Historic Buildings Inventory, 174-87; Norma Jean and Carole Darden, Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine: Recipes and Reminiscences of a Family (Garden City, N. Y., Anchor Press, 1978), 68-73.

plants were located on the railroad line, factory workers were within walking distance of their jobs. Many lived on the side streets in rows of "shotgun" houses consisting of three rooms, one behind the other. Unlike the textile industry, tobacco companies did not furnish housing to workers. Usually factory workers rented by the week, often from white landlords who invested in rental housing in East Wilson. Many East Wilson residents were like the Batts family: they appreciated work opportunities in the tobacco industry, but struggled to accumulate any savings. Like white textile workers who moved from farm to the mill, their employment did not eliminate poverty, but did provide Saturday pay checks more dependable than the year-end share on the farm.[47]

Although both Durham and Wilson developed strong black communities, there were major differences in white leadership of the two areas. In his study of New South leadership, Billings dissociates the Duke family and other tobacco manufacturers from the "landed upper class," noting that they were less involved with farm ownership and "had no class interests in preserving the agrarian social order." By hiring blacks workers and paying high

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[47] Bainbridge, Historic Buildings Inventory, 183; Garrett Weaver, "The Development of the Black Durham Community, 1880-1915" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of North Carolina, 1987), 341-42, 379.

wages, these "new men" created social and economic opportunities for men and women of color in tobacco towns: "A different community ethos came to characterize the towns along tobacco road."[48]

Although Durham may have shaken planter connections, that was not the situation in Wilson County. There the tobacco industry was a part of an agrarian economy from its beginning when county planters organized and invested in the early prize houses. As long as the simple tobacco prizery was the extent of processing, planter-businessmen saw economic potential, but competition with the Trust was overpowering and prize houses gave way to new technology and big business. Efforts at cigarette production in Wilson were limited and involved even less planter participation and investment. As these local leaf cigarette manufacturers struggled to compete with the Trust, most either closed or sold out in the process. For the most part, when their local processing and manufacturing efforts ended, planters left tobacco processing to new men and concentrated their efforts on agricultural production and marketing.

Left to a few local leaf dealers and the offspring of the Trust, the redrying plants in Wilson were less entrepreneurial and home-based. The larger processing plants became more cosmopolitan at the management levels.

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[48] Billings, Planters, 117-19.

In Wilson the New South entrepreneurs who rose to prominence in tobacco processing were the small independent leaf dealers like W. T. Clark, R. P. Watson, and James I. Miller. All three were newcomers to Wilson, although they became dedicated residents serving on local boards, supporting the churches with their leadership and wealth, and fitting into the social environment. Many of the managers of the national companies came and went. Their loyalties often remained with national tobacco economics, not with the local community.

Although tobacco processing provided opportunities for black employment and a community environment in East Wilson, the benefits were limited. Many workers existed on low wages and resided in substandard housing. Offering only seasonal employment, redrying plants did not alter agricultural labor patterns. They kept factory workers in tobacco and cotton fields for part of the year to the pleasure of county planters in need of labor. Left with work for only part of the year, many workers found it difficult to advance beyond the poverty of their rural upbringing and questioned if they were not better off to have remained there.

CHAPTER 6

FARMER DISCONTENT AND SOLUTIONS

In the 1880s Wilson County farmers sought economic security through production of bright tobacco, but the new crop remained far from secure. As with cotton, tobacco prices fluctuated, dependent on world demand and U.S. production. For the next fifty years farmers struggled with farm prices, often unsure of whom to blame for their volatility. Targeting the auction system in periods of low prices, they organized into marketing cooperatives, but their efforts and results were limited. Too much money, power, and community loyalty supported local warehousemen. Farmers realized that crop reduction was an answer, but few were willing to reduce production of a profitable crop when no real economic alternatives existed. Only after the entire country became enveloped in New Deal legislation of the 1930s were farmers willing to involve the government in control of tobacco production. Crop control reduced tobacco producers as well as tobacco production, and government efforts intended to be temporary became permanent.

Piedmont tobacco farmers joined the Farmers' Alliance in the period of low crop prices in the 1880s. Seeking ways to gain more profits, Alliancemen operated their own tobacco warehouses from 1888-1897 to eliminate costs of

middlemen in the auction system. Farmers had complained about excessive warehouse commissions, so Alliancemen set more reasonable fees at Alliance houses where members sold their tobacco. Generally their warehouse efforts were financially unproductive, and by the Panic of 1893 most of them had closed. North Carolina Populist legislation in 1895 set warehouse fees satisfactory to farmers and diffused the issue.[1]

Although Wilson County had a Farmers' Alliance organization in the 1890s, there was less discontent among tobacco growers who were just beginning to develop the crop and were pleased to have alternative income as cotton prices declined. They were similar to bright tobacco farmers in South Carolina where "growers, enjoying the first flush of success with their new crop, were too busy and too delighted to give the agrarian movement much notice."[2]

During the next cycle of low tobacco prices at the turn of the century, producer discontent began to

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[1] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 405-20; Robert C. McMath, Jr., "Agrarian Protest at the Forks of the Creek: Three Subordinate Farmers' Alliances in North Carolina," The North Carolina Historical Review (Jan. 1974), 41, 51-52.

[2] The Wilson Mirror, July, 9, 1890; Eldred Eugene Prince, Jr., "Long Green: Money, Tobacco, and South Carolina," (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of South Carolina, 1972), 115.

increase. Again farmers in Virginia and North Carolina began to organize, but their associations were often nonproductive, with poor leadership and vague goals. Farmers' organizations were not united under the same name, and members were unsure of just what they wanted to accomplish. Producers simply wanted a better price for their tobacco and did not know who to blame for reduced returns. With confusion among planters, politicians could easily gain farmer support by blaming the Tobacco Trust for low prices. Editor of the Raleigh News and Observer and ardent Democrat, Josephus Daniels consistently fought the Republican Duke family in the press by pitting the North Carolina tobacco farmer against the Trust.[3]

As long as producers blamed the American Tobacco Company, warehousemen supported the planters, but by 1903 the farmer organizations decided that their problems came from the auction system. Although farmers disliked the Trust, they also were unsure about the fairness of warehouse auction methods. Wilson farmers were involved in several farmers' organizations to alter selling methods during the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1904 they organized a local chapter of the Inter-State Tobacco Growers' Protective Association to bypass the warehouse auction and create storage and redrying facilities to hold tobacco until prices reached acceptable

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[3] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 424-25, 428.

levels. The Wilson chapter developed a substantial membership and slate of officers, but got no further than its organizational stage. The state organization also remained indecisive and never developed an effective alternative for the auction method. Most of the efforts were limited to discussions without concrete results.[4]

Seeking an alternative cooperative, farmers in Greenville, North Carolina organized the Farmers' Consolidated Tobacco Company in 1903. These stockholders hoped to create a successful tobacco auction warehouse which could encourage other farmer cooperatives. By 1911 their efforts had been successful enough to establish several warehouses in Robersonville, Kinston, and Wilson. The Wilson house encouraged farmers to sell with the organization to "protect your own interests," and advertized local tobacco auctioneer "Red Cap" Davis as a member of its sales force. The Farmers' Consolidated disbanded in 1912, in spite of successful years. Improved tobacco prices and criticism at private warehouses finally disrupted their efforts.[5]

Both the Inter-State Tobacco Growers' Protective Association and the Farmers' Consolidated Tobacco Company faced criticism from the existing warehousemen who saw

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[4] Ibid., 439-42.

[5] The Wilson Times, Sept. 8, 1911; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 442-43.

them as a threat to their businesses. The Southern Tobacco Journal, voice of the warehousemen, pitted the organizations against the longevity of the traditional auction system and promoted the benefits of having experienced tobacco men to market the farmers' crop. With support from many loyal customers and their tenants, it often took only a passing rumor from a warehouseman to discourage tobacco farmers from patronizing a cooperative warehouse. Also many farmers who were indebted to lenders found that the new cooperative selling systems did not provide immediate cash needed to pay off pressing debts.[6]

By the 1910s disgruntled tobacco farmers joined the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union. Originating in Texas and moving to North Carolina in 1905, the organization resumed the fight to create direct sales of tobacco from farmer to manufacturer. By eliminating the auction sale, the Farmers' Union provided farmers storage and redrying facilities and negotiated sales directly to manufacturers. The Wilson Farmers' Union used the Watson Warehouse facilities and had 438 members as late as 1919. But the organization phased out within the next ten years, as high tobacco prices at private auction houses lured farmers away from the cooperative methods.[7]

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[6] Ibid., 431, 443.

[7] Ibid., 445-47; Clark, "Reflections," 792; Charles P. Loomis, "The Rise and Decline of the North Carolina Farmer's

During the 1910s as war in Europe disrupted shipping and forced United States manufacturers to use more domestic tobacco in cigarette blends, prices for home-grown leaf rose rapidly, offering hope to Carolina farmers. Up from 12.16 cents per pound in 1915, the Wilson market averaged from twenty to thirty-six cents per pound from 1916-1918. Prices in the first four days of sales in Wilson in 1919 averaged over 40 cents a pound, and the 1919 averages were even higher, at 53.67 cents.[8]

The years of excessive prices were short-lived. By 1920 the world tobacco market revived, and reduced demand for domestic leaf was reflected in a drastic price drop. The 1920 tobacco averages on the Wilson market were only 21.61 cents per pound. Farmers who had enjoyed better income for a number of years were suddenly discouraged and angry. Part of the price drop was due to an inferior crop, but the decline was so drastic that few producers could accept it. Encouraged to plant a large tobacco crop in 1920 by warehousemen, lenders, and fertilizer and mule dealers, farmers had planted their crops based on pre-war prices with expensive labor and fertilizer. The price

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Union," The North Carolina Historical Review 7 (1930), 305, 311, 314.

[8] Tennant, American Cigarette Industry, 79; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 354; The Daily Times, Sept. 8, 1919; The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 18, 1939.

decline meant that farmers would lose their investments and would not be able to pay their creditors. With the migration of the boll weevil into the Carolinas by the 1920s, reliance on cotton production was limited.[9]

As prices fell during the 1920 market season, tobacco farmers became aggressive, and Wilson warehouses closed to prevent violence. Amid discussions of crop reductions, Wilson farmers met in September 1920 to organize a cooperative marketing system. As other communities held meetings, local farmers developed plans for enlisting members and marketing their tobacco. Their combined efforts created the Tri-State Tobacco Growers' Cooperative Association in December 1920, linking communities in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia through local chapters.[10]

With support from various groups on local, state, and national levels, the association grew quickly. The Agricultural Extension Service provided aid in gaining pledges from producers while association officers brought cooperative labor leader Aaron Sapiro from California to plan the organization. Clarence Poe, a long-time cooperative advocate, provided editorial support in the

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[9] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 354, 392, 451; Prince, "Long Green," 134.

[10] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 452-53; Rapport Papers, SHC, Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 402-3.

Progressive Farmer, and the North Carolina legislature passed needed legislation making the organization workable. By the end of 1921 the Tri-State Cooperative had 64,000 members statewide who paid a three-dollar membership fee and signed five-year contracts to market their tobacco with the organization.[11]

Like earlier farmers' organizations, the Tri-State Tobacco Growers' Association addressed social as well as economic issues of farm members. Editors of the organization's Tri-State Tobacco Grower magazine promoted membership of farm wives in Women's Auxiliaries, encouraging "joint sessions occasionally" with the men. Cooperative leaders considered farm wives to be integral parts of the farm family, and many schoolhouse meetings involved covered dish meals with "well filled dinner baskets from the farm kitchens." The integration of black farmers in the cooperative was limited, but "colored" locals organized in North Carolina. With only 29.2 percent of black farmers owning their farms in the state in 1920, most black farmers involved in cooperative tobacco marketing did so through their landlords.[12]

In 1922 tobacco farmers established the Tobacco Growers' Cooperative Association Warehouse just outside

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[11] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 453-55.

[12] Tri-State Tobacco Grower, Mar.; April 1924; July 1924; Hobbs, Economic and Social Profile, 337.

Wilson's warehouse district. The association was not under the authority of the Wilson Tobacco Board of Trade, since the organization did not conduct tobacco sales in a typical auction format. Instead, tobacco buyers submitted leaf bids to cooperative management who then negotiated a final price. The cooperative advanced members from 40-65 percent of an estimated price per grade for their tobacco when delivered, then paid the remainder when the association sold the leaf to the manufacturers.[13]

Without an auction system, association members "pooled" their tobacco and then received payment on the grade and amount of their leaf. For producers who needed quick cash at harvest, banks allowed growers to borrow on their "participation certificate." Many producers were still hesitant to release tobacco without full payment, and pooling methods required constant promotion to convince independent farmers that the system worked. To assure farmers, the Tri-State Tobacco Grower printed testimonials of local producers:

> Mr. J. E. Howell, of Lucama, N. C., Route 1, had three acres of tobacco, 3,120 pounds, that he has already received $642.69 for. He says his neighbor only got a little over $600.00 for five acres that were just as good as his. His neighbor sold his on the auction floor.[14]

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[13] Clark, "Reflections," 829-33; Rapport Papers, 405.

[14] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 466; Tri-State Tobacco Grower, July 1924.

Just as with the other failed cooperative efforts in the twentieth century, the attempts to eliminate the warehouse auction system marked the downfall of the Tri-State Tobacco Cooperative Association. The main resistance to cooperative marketing came from warehousemen and leaf dealers, both of whom stood to lose business. Already organized under tobacco boards of trade, the power of these two groups spread from the tobacco field to the manufacturing level. As the cooperative efforts expanded in 1921, local tobacco boards began their attacks. Boards in Wilson, Kinston, and Greenville advertised that members would maintain the auction sales system, indicating that there would be little cooperation with cooperative methods.[15]

When cooperative organizer Aaron Sapiro threatened to destroy the auction system and "make grass grow in the streets of Wilson," the local board members became immediately alarmed. In an April 1922 meeting of the Wilson Tobacco Board of Trade, leaf dealer W. T. Clark pledged to resist the Tri-State Tobacco Association:

> If we want to go in and fight this thing I am with you with my money and everything else. We must either give in or fight the movement and preserve the Wilson market, or else do nothing and let this market be done away with.

Joe Eagles of the Centre Brick Warehouse was concerned for Wilson County investments and feared that if the

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[15] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 469-70.

cooperative system was a success "Wilson property would not be worth over 60% of its present value."[16]

The Wilson Tobacco Board members moved into action as farmers began to organize a local Tri-State warehouse. The secretary of the Wilson board believed " selling the tobacco as fast as it is received will defeat the pool in this section." The board assessed each member a fee of a hundred dollars to pay for a campaign to eliminate the cooperative association. Planning their efforts "on a high plane," they " did not want to do anything to give the opposition any reason to say that we were acting unfairly."[17]

In a local meeting with bankers and businessmen, the Wilson board gained community support to fight cooperative marketing. Minutes of the meeting indicate that "all of the citizens of Wilson at this meeting voted unanimously to work against the 'co-op' plan." The board's publicity committee distributed propaganda flyers to farmers, encouraging them to sell at auction houses. Funds from the Wilson Tobacco Board of Trade financed Wilson pinhooker Robert McFarland's Tobacco Farmer publication during the summer of 1923. Writing in his own publication as well as in The Southern Tobacco Journal, McFarland made

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[16] Minute Book, Wilson Tobacco Board of Trade, April 1922, Wilson Tobacco Board of Trade, Wilson, N.C., 1-3.

[17] Ibid., 4.

every effort to discredit the cooperative by creating suspicions about the leadership and management.[18]

As the Tobacco Board's propaganda circulated, business and political interests joined the fight against cooperative sales locally as well as on the state level. The Wilson Daily Times ran articles questioning cooperative leadership, and in the state house, representative Henry G. Conner of Wilson attacked the association's right to hold farmers to their contracts. In the summer of 1923 the North Carolina Warehouse Association met at Silver Lake in Wilson County. Owned by tobacconist Charles M. Fleming, in 1922 the sixteen acre lake was a local recreational facility for boating and swimming. Amid this festive environment, the Silver Lake convention became another attempt by Wilson warehousemen to resist cooperative selling methods. At the gathering, warehousemen joined forces with local bankers who were also fearful that cooperative successes might affect their own businesses. Speaking to the group, Wilson bankers Robert Boswell of the Farmers' Banking and Trust Company and John Bruton of the First National Bank committed their efforts in the fight against cooperative selling. Boswell defended the auction method, and Bruton attacked the cooperative for its contract system, depicted as forcing

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[18] Ibid., 5-6; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 459, 475-76.

farmers to sell to the association.[19]

Resistance by tobacco manufacturers was more subtle. In many ways the cooperative selling methods benefitted tobacco companies who could purchase graded leaf in bulk, but companies became concerned over the Tri-State Association's apparent desire to develop a "monopoly of supply and ... the possibility of price control." Fear of cooperative threats pushed manufacturers toward support of the traditional auction system. Tobacco companies supported McFarland's anti-cooperative Tobacco Farmer journal with generous advertising in 1923. As the resistance intensified, both the American and Imperial companies boycotted the purchase of cooperative tobacco and offered higher prices for leaf bought on auction sales. A 1925 Federal Trade Commission investigation into the buying practices of Imperial Tobacco revealed no irregularities on their part, yet later evidence indicated that prices on the auction markets averaged higher than cooperative averages.[20]

Resistance to the Tri-State Cooperative was widespread and damaging. Confused by conflicting

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[19] Minute Book, 12; Clark, "Reflections," 79-80; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 478-79; Badger, Prosperity Road, 24.

[20] Woofter, Plight of Cigarette Tobacco, 49-51; Rapport Papers, 415-25.

propaganda, many association members were not loyal to the cooperative and sold tobacco at auction houses under the names of family members. The high percentage of tenant farmers in the Coastal Plain found the association's divided payment system difficult to satisfy lenders who were used to full payments at harvest. Although large numbers of tobacco producers joined the Tri-State Association, 35 percent of flue-cured producers never were members. Many of those who did join also believed rumors which had circulated about mismanagement within the cooperative and began to seek legal methods to get out of cooperative contracts. After an investigation by the Federal Trade Commission, the courts legally restrained the Tri-State Tobacco Cooperative from business in 1926 and sold its facilities to other companies.[21]

Although cooperative methods were a failure, they addressed some of the major issues facing tobacco producers in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The Tri-State Association had attempted to link farmers and buyers with standard grading procedures and fair prices for cured leaf. Farmers had long remained suspicious of the buying practices on the auction system. Unsure of buyers methods of grading and pricing, farmers were never sure whether

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[21] Prince, "Long Green," 137-58; Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 466, 480-85; The Daily Times, Jan. 4, 1926; Badger, Prosperity Road, 25; Daniel, Breaking the Land, 36.

they were being cheated out of their year's work at sales time. Each major tobacco company had its own grading system to fit its cigarette requirements. With tobacco piles sold at a rate of three hundred an hour, buyers were able to average their prices among the volume purchased to maintain buying limits. To farmers, it appeared that tobacco varied in price even when it was of the same quality.[22]

In their uncertainty over pricing, many farmers felt that it was helpful to provide incentives to buyers. Although such efforts were debatable, Wilson County farmers placed dressed quail, pork hams, or scuppernong grapes on piles of tobacco to entice buyers to increase their bids. Other farmers felt that tobacco sold on the beginning sales and first rows brought higher prices before buyers ran out of energy and money. Farmers who were dissatisfied with tobacco prices could always "turn tags" on individual piles and refuse to sell, but many were willing to accept low prices. Often farmers were not able to stay in town for the night for another sale and usually did not wish to haul the tobacco back home where it might deteriorate. Most producers felt that the auction sale was a buyer's market and that they had little choice but to accept what they could receive.[23]

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[22] Woofter, Plight of Cigarette Tobacco, 7, 42-43.

[23] Thigpen interview.

The Warehouse Act of 1916 attempted to address farmers' concerns over ambiguity of company grading methods by authorizing the federal government to organize grade standards and a service to carry them out. It was not until 1929 that the government experimented with a tobacco grading plan in North Carolina on the Smithfield market. Farmers were unsure if buyers would use the system, and since the farmer had to pay a fee for the service, few made use of it. Talk of mandatory government grading met opposition from warehousemen who associated it with cooperative marketing.[24]

With price and grading uncertainties, tobacco farmers of the 1920s grew more dissatisfied. On the Wilson market, average prices dropped from 29.94 cents per pound in 1922 to 20.32 cents in 1929. Yet even at the 1929 prices tobacco remained higher in relation to the 1909-1914 base than prices of any other major agricultural commodity groups. Farmers who grew tobacco were producing the best of crop choices. With no real crop alternatives, Coastal Plain farmers increased tobacco acreage during the decade in an attempt to offset low prices. In 1929 the New Belt produced 265,324 acres, up considerably from the 219,998 in 1920. But as acreage climbed, the prices

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[24] Woofter, Plight of Cigarette Tobacco, 53; Badger, Prosperity Road, 19, 105.

continued to fall over 50 percent from 1929 to 1932.[25]

As tobacco production increased in the 1920s there were several unsuccessful attempts at reducing crop acreage. When Governor Gardner's "Live At Home" program appeared ineffective, suggestions of a new cooperative effort surfaced. Created by the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929, the Federal Farm Board pursued the development of a government supervised farm cooperative. Although growers discussed acreage cuts of up to 25 percent, they were reluctant to endorse a cooperative effort in 1931. Memories of the "failed cooperative" were too recent for growers, and too much hostility remained from warehousemen. Warehousemen were more favorable toward development of voluntary crop acreage reduction in North Carolina. In 1931 and 1932 they promoted crop reductions of up to 35 percent, but obtained limited response from growers. Prompted by crop acreage reduction plans in other southern states in 1931, Raleigh News and Observer editor Josephus Daniels promoted a special session of the General Assembly to enact legislation reducing North Carolina cotton and tobacco plantings for 1932.[26]

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[25] Tilley, Bright-Tobacco Industry, 355, 357; Calvin B. Hoover and B. U. Ratchford, Economic Resources and Policies of the South (New York: MacMillian Co., 1951), 338-39, 345.

[26] Badger, Prosperity Road, 27-34.

While farmers and state leaders pushed for crop reductions, conditions continued to decline among North Carolina farmers. As the worldwide depression continued, foreign markets reduced purchases of foreign goods, dropping both cotton and tobacco prices. Suffering from reduced income, many farmers were unable to pay property taxes. In 1930 there were over 150,000 pieces of North Carolina property sold at tax sales. By 1931 when cotton prices dropped to six cents and tobacco sold for nine cents a pound, the state legislature had to reduce property taxes in order to save economically depressed landowners from losing everything. By 1932 banks and time-merchants were unable to finance farm owners, renters and croppers. As North Carolina farm owners reacted to financial pressures, they began to release tenant families. Displacement began in the 1920s but escalated in the years 1931 and 1932 in the counties of Nash, Wayne, Greene, and Wilson.[27]

By 1933 economically depressed farmers hoped for relief and recovery with passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act. The New Deal farm bill provided for production controls through the Voluntary Domestic Allotment Plan. Farmers who contracted to remove acreage of commodity crops from production received parity

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[27] Ibid., 21-23; The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 18, 1939; Blackwell, "Displaced Tenant Family," 69.

payments based on a historic base of production. A processing tax levied on manufacturers provided funds to pay farmers for crop reductions.[28]

Political power of congressmen from tobacco producing states successfully included tobacco as a basic commodity and developed an appropriate parity price. The parity price for all crops but tobacco was based on the years from 1909 to 1914, a time when farmers received fair market prices. To have used those years to calculate tobacco parity meant that farmers would receive less than the price of their 1932 leaf. Therefore the base period for tobacco parity was set from August 1919 to July 1928. The new base years increased parity prices for flue-cured and burley 25-30 percent.[29]

The Cotton Section of the AAA immediately organized a program to cut crop acreage. In July 1933 North Carolina farmers placed 50 percent of their cotton acreage in the program; Wilson County farmers signed up 4,650 of their 8,784 acres. With cotton already laid-by, program participants had to plow-up the acreage to comply with their agreed reduction. Daily Times editors encouraged farmers to sign up for crop reductions and continued to

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[28] Martin, "Participation in the AAA," 28-33.

[29] Badger, Prosperity Road, 39-40; Hoover, Economic Resources, 343-44.

encourage hesitant farmers to plow-up cotton.[30]

Unlike cotton, there were not specific program controls for flue-cured tobacco acreage in 1933. That year officials at the AAA produced a workable control program for cigar leaf since production was small, but postponed a program for flue-cured tobacco until 1934. Remembering past cooperative efforts, AAA officials knew that such a program required the endorsement of both growers and buyers. In a Washington meeting with tobacco manufacturers on July 27, 1933, AAA representatives indicated tentative plans for a program control, but the tobacco companies were not receptive to paying a processing tax.[31]

The next day, in a meeting with leading tobacco growers at North Carolina State College in Raleigh, AAA officials explained the success of the cigar leaf program and emphasized that flue-cured tobacco growers needed to be supportive of crop controls to insure a workable program. After attending the meeting, the local media anticipated "a crop adjustment plan " before the openings of the North Carolina flue-cured markets on August 15.[32]

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[30] Daniel, Breaking the Land, 92; The Daily Times, July 13; Aug. 10, 1933.

[31] Badger, Prosperity Road, 44-46, 49; The Daily Times, July 28, 1933.

[32] Badger, Prosperity Road, 47; The Daily Times, July

Discussions of a tobacco program coincided with the opening of the Georgia flue-cured tobacco market. Local tobacco buyers left Wilson for the opening day on August 1, and farmers awaited news of opening-day prices as a prediction of the 1933 sales. Initial sales were positive, with prices better than those the previous year, but hopes dimmed as the Georgia prices began to drop. Adding to their disappointment, flue-cured leaf farmers learned from Washington that there would be little chance of a tobacco processing tax to pay for a 1933 program. Instead, the AAA hoped that manufacturers would raise prices on the 1933 crop out of anticipation of reduced acreage in 1934.[33]

With the possibility that the North Carolina market would open without a tobacco program, tobacco farmers pressured the AAA in August to take action. Many of them were already participating in the cotton program and expected government assistance: "Tobacco farmers have seen the government come to the relief of cotton and wheat and now they want also to be saved from bankruptcy and want." Through resolutions developed at mass meetings across the flue-cured tobacco belts, farmers encouraged government action on the 1933 crop. This type of commitment from growers was what AAA officials desired.

29, 1933.

[33] Ibid., July 29; Aug. 1; Aug. 2, 1933.

With farm pressure for a processing tax to fund a tobacco program, officials hoped for cooperation from tobacco manufacturers.[34]

When markets opened on the Border Belt in the Carolinas, leaf prices remained only a few cents above averages of the previous year and then began to drop further below production costs. Further agitating farmers were the high profits manufacturers gained from cigarette sales. Although producers were selling below production costs, manufacturers increased their prices on cigarettes. The average wholesale cigarette price rose from $5.40 per thousand in 1929 to over $6.00 in 1932.[35]

On August 29 as the Eastern Belt opened, prices remained low. With the highest leaf averages on the bright belt markets, the Wilson market averaged 10.93 cents per pound, seven cents below parity. Anticipating low prices, growers in the Eastern Belt already had arranged to meet at the Memorial Auditorium in Raleigh on August 31. There they demanded that the governor close the warehouses until arrangements could be made to improve

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[34] Ibid., Aug. 2; Aug. 10, 1933; Badger, Prosperity Road, 50.

[35] James C. Daniel, "The North Carolina Tobacco Marketing Crisis Of 1933," The North Carolina Historical Review 41 (Summer 1964): 372-33; Hoover, Economic Resources, 345.

prices to a twenty cents per pound level.[36]

North Carolina Governor J. C. B. Ehringhaus immediately called for a "voluntary marketing holiday, to continue until further proclamation" and convinced Governor Blackwood of South Carolina to do the same. With support from warehousemen, Wilson's nine warehouses closed after the next day's sales in order to clear the floors of leaf. In a Washington tobacco conference on September 4, Ehringhaus, the North Carolina senators and most of the state's congressmen pressured the AAA to begin an immediate sign-up for a tentative grower contract to reduce the 1934 tobacco crop.[37]

With the support of the community leaders, local newspapers, and county extension agents, the sign-up for crop control was successful. Wilson County farmers flocked to the courthouse to sign. So many farmers attended that extension agents had to relocate in the nearby high school auditorium. The government contract tentatively called for a crop reduction of not more than 30 percent for 1934 and 1935. Reduction was based on the tobacco acreage planted and poundage produced in 1931-1933. By September 13 more than 1,800 Wilson County tobacco producers had signed to reduce their 1934 tobacco

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[36] The Daily Times, Sept. 1, 1933.

[37] Ibid.; Daniel, "Marketing Crisis," 376; Badger, Prosperity Road, 52-53.

crop, helped by "scores of workers" who urged both "planters and landlords" to endorse the acreage reductions. That same day Governor Ehringhaus announced that farmers had signed up as much as 98 percent of tobacco acreage in eastern North Carolina.[38]

With a crop reduction planned for 1934, growers were ready to market their tobacco, but Ehringhaus kept the markets closed until September 25, hoping for an agreement with tobacco companies to purchase leaf at parity prices. Even with Ehringhaus' postponement, companies failed to reach an agreement with the AAA and tobacco growers before markets opened. Sales on the newly opened markets averaged twelve to thirteen cents a pound, still not reaching parity. But cash-stressed farmers glutted markets, hoping to sell some of the crop after a three-week delay.[39]

As negotiations continued in Washington with the manufacturers, the AAA began development of a licensing program to fine manufacturers who refused to cooperate. Such pressure created a compromise between the manufacturers and the government. The agreement signed on October 6 required companies to buy 250,000 pounds of tobacco at an average of seventeen cents per pound. The

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[38] Ibid., 55; The Daily Times, Sept. 9, 12, 1933; Daniel, "Marketing Crisis," 377.

[39] The Daily Times, Sept. 18, 25, 27, 29, 1933.

average price of tobacco purchased after the agreement reached 17.25, with a flue-cured crop average for 1933 at 15.3 cents per pound, two and a half times that of 1932 prices. The Wilson market average was even higher at 16.82 cents per pound for the 1933 season.[40]

With a crop reduction decided for the 1934 flue-cured tobacco crop, 95 percent of North Carolina growers signed up by the end of February. Participating farmers were already concerned about those who refused to be a part of the voluntary program. The AAA hoped to entice farmers into the control program with attractive payments, but many participants wanted compulsory control. The Kerr-Scott Act, passed in June 1934, provided for a penalty tax of one-fourth to one-third of the sales price of tobacco grown by those who did not sign contracts or grew tobacco beyond allotment levels. To identify program participants, the AAA issued contract growers tax exemption warrants. Nonsigners produced little excess tobacco, and the average 1934 flue-cured prices were 27.3 cents per pound. The Wilson market continued to maintain a higher average of 29.69 cents. By December 1934 tobacco growers voted to continue the tax on

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[40] Daniel, "Marketing Crisis,' 378-81; Badger, Prosperity Road, 58-63, 65; The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 15, 1951.

nonsigners.[41]

As crop reduction became effective, concerns arose over the displacement of cotton and tobacco tenants. In 1934 there were 8,000 to 11,000 displaced farm families in North Carolina without a crop. Seventy-five per cent of those were on relief rolls. With reduced acreage in crops, landlords needed fewer tenants and took advantage of government relief to move their unneeded workers to town. Lorena Hickok, chief investigator for the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, reported that landlords were "darned glad to have us take over the job" of furnishing tenants.[42]

In February 1934 Hickok found the relief office in Wilson "so crowded you could hardly get into the place. Every house, every abandoned shack, is filled with them." From 1931-1934 three hundred displaced tenants moved to Wilson, two-thirds having moved during the winter of 1934. Fifty of the families received help from landlords who

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[41] Badger, Prosperity Road, 72, 76-90, 94-96; Hoover, Economic Resources, 346.

[42] Donald H. Grubbs, Cry From the Cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1971); Harold Hoffsommer, "The AAA and the Cropper," Social Forces (May 1935), 494-502; Blackwell, "Displaced Tenant Family," 66; Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, eds., One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois, 1983), 187.

moved them and paid their first week's rent. Seventy-five percent of the displaced tenants were black. Hickok expressed her impressions of these landless residents in Wilson:

> They're NOT all bums, either. They HAVEN'T come to town to get work in the mills or on CWA. They've come because there's no place for them to live in the country. Every abandoned shack in the countryside is filled up.[43]

In rural Wilson County Hickok interviewed three squatter families where she found deplorable living conditions. During her February 1934 visits, all the families lived in inadequate quarters: one, in a house "about as weather proof as an old-fashioned Western corn crib;" another in a shed, and the third in a tobacco barn. The family in the shed paid seventy-five cents a week rent, but the tobacco barn residents had free, but temporary housing. When Hickok interviewed a sixteen-year-old girl living in the tobacco barn, the youth was despondent when asked about her economic situation:

> Seems like we just keep goin' lower and lower....He can't git no crop. (Referring to her father.) He's been everywhere. All of us has had colds ever since we moved into this place. And pretty soon we ain't even goin' to have this place any more.[44]

The same year that Hickok made her report, Gordon Blackwell studied 825 displaced tenants in Greene, Wilson, and Nash Counties. Of that group, 66 percent were black

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[43] Ibid., 188-89.

[44] Ibid., 189-90.

and 34 percent were white. Blackwell noted that more blacks than whites were displaced from 1929-1931; the white displacement was higher than that of blacks from 1932-1934. Blackwell's typical displaced family consisted of three to four workers out of a household of five or six. Poorly educated, only one family in twenty ever owned land, and about a half owed debts, usually less than fifty dollars. They had moved frequently, but over half the families had lived all their lives in the same county.[45]

Tenants without crops who remained in the rural areas of Wilson County became "squatters," as Hickok termed them. About 50 percent of these rural families in Wilson County paid rent for their houses, while about 20 percent lived rent-free. Twenty-five to 30 percent of the rural families had use of the house in order to provide day labor on the owner's crop. Farm operators paid them for their work, although the pay was usually lower than community wages. Three-fourths of the rural displaced families were allowed to cut wood and raise gardens, and a half could use the owner's team and equipment. Some of the Wilson families owned livestock. Three percent of displaced tenants in Wilson owned a cow; 31 percent owned pigs; 66 percent had chickens; none owned mules, but 3

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[45] Blackwell, "Displaced Tenant Family," 66-67.

percent owned automobiles.[46]

The "more ambitious" displaced tenants in Wilson County moved into the town of Wilson seeking jobs in the tobacco warehouses and processing plants. The urban families had larger numbers of eligible workers, a higher percentage of past farm ownership, and more experience in raising a variety of farm crops than rural displaced families, yet their economic situation was not as stable. In town almost all had to pay rent for their homes, and few received fuel, garden spots, or work stock and equipment. Lacking skills needed for urban employment, most hoped to return to the farm.[47]

Frequent mobility of farm tenants and differing perspectives created difficulty in determining the causes for displacement of tenants. When asked why they were displaced, 48 percent of the tenants in Blackwell's study responded that the landlord could not finance them any longer or that they moved due to their own choice. Only 29 percent of their former landlords included those reasons. Thirty-nine percent of their former landlords indicated that tenants were displaced because they were "undesirable," although only 2 percent of tenants agreed.[48]

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[46] Ibid., 70-71.

[47] Ibid., 72.

[48] Ibid., 67-68.

Although reasons for moving were debatable, few tenants lost their crops because of acreage control programs. With 68 percent of the tenants in Blackwell's study already without crops before 1933, displacement in the three counties was evident well before the crop control programs began. Only 5 percent of tenants and 4 percent of landlords blamed crop acreage reduction contracts for displacement. In the 1934 and 1935 tobacco control contracts, AAA officials attempted to eliminate tenant displacement by requiring that landlords not reduce tenants because of crop reduction.[49]

But there were other reasons that landless farmers found crop control abusive. Under both the cotton and tobacco programs, landlords received the rental payments. Price-equalizing and benefit payments initially went to landlords to divide with the tenant based on his share of the crop. AAA officials initially felt that to separate payments would be administratively inefficient. As a result, some landlords were unfair in distributing payments to tenants. In Wilson County all tenure groups and both races complained in later years that there were unfair practices in parity payments. Lower tenure groups tended to be the least satisfied with the early payment system. By 1937 the government mailed parity checks to

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[49] Ibid., 68-69; Distribution of Displaced Tenants, Appendix G; Badger, Prosperity Road, 201.

both landlord and tenant, and both groups preferred the revised payment system.[50]

In general, displacement of North Carolina cotton and tobacco tenants appears to have been far less severe than the 26 per cent displacement of tenants in other southern states where cotton predominated. Using his three county area as a model, Blackwell estimated 10 percent tenant displacement from 1929-1934 in the twenty-eight North Carolina counties with tenancy rates over 60 percent. State percentage of displaced tenants dropped when Blackwell determined that there were far fewer in the seventy-two remaining counties with lower tenancy rates.[51]

In 1935, to the dismay of farmers, the AAA increased tobacco farmers' acreage to 85 per cent of the base under the control program. Average prices dropped to around twenty cents per pound, but the higher acreage made up for the price decline. Although farmers voted for crop control for 1936, the United States Supreme Court declared in the Hoosac Mills case that the 1933 AAA production control was unconstitutional. As a result the government substituted the existing Soil Conservation and Domestic

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[50] Ibid., 200; Martin, "Participation in the AAA," 275-76.

[51] Blackwell, "Displaced Tenant Family," 69; Appendix G.

Allotment Act to create crop control. Under this program farmers received payments for diverting cotton and tobacco from production and planting soil-improving crops. These payments were the only incentive for farmers to reduce their crops in 1936 and 1937. Although participants often did little to actually improve the soil, they did regard the soil conservation plan as a continuation of crop control. Their efforts at crop reduction kept tobacco prices climbing. The average tobacco prices on the Wilson market increased to 23.21 cents per pound in 1936 and 25.69 cents in 1937.[52]

In 1936 North Carolina congressmen and growers attempted to achieve a more substantial crop control program by promoting a control agreement between the tobacco growing states. Wilson merchants closed up their businesses during mid-day on April 21, 1936, to encourage area farmers to attend a Raleigh meeting with Governor Ehringhaus on the tobacco compact. But tobacco growers were disappointed when the governor sent them home with the message that he would not support a compact. Believing that a state compact was flawed, Ehringhaus promoted voluntary crop reduction instead.[53]

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[52] Badger, Prosperity Road, 121-25; Hoover, Economic Resources, 347; Martin, "Participation in the AA," 40-44; The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 15, 1951.

[53] The Daily Times, April 20, 21, 1936; Badger,

Tobacco farmers were pleased to gain a more permanent tobacco control program when Congress passed a second Agricultural Adjustment Act in February 1938. The act allowed the Secretary of Agriculture to set annual marketing quotas by November 15 based on crop reserves. Two-thirds of the growers had to approve the quota in a referendum held within thirty days. The control program included a 50 percent tax on tobacco sold in excess of quotas, but made concessions so that producers with small bases were protected from excessive reductions.[54]

In the March 1938 referendum 89.6 percent of North Carolina producers and over 90 percent of Wilson County growers voted for tobacco reductions established by the Secretary. Yet there were opponents to the plan. Unlike the low prices of 1933, successful tobacco prices in 1936 and 1937 made compulsory crop control less appealing to many tobacco farmers. Due to encroachment on planting, the AAA hastily used allotments established by the acreage conservation program and restricted growers by the poundage they could market. Allotment assignments arrived when farmers were planting their crop, and quotas were not known until a few days before the markets opened. Disgruntled farmers questioned the manner in which both

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Prosperity Road, 126-137.

[54] Ibid., 149; Martin, "Participation in the AAA," 106-7.

were derived and resented the poor timing in which they were issued. When crop prices averaged less than those of 1937, farmers were disgusted with the program. As a result flue-cured tobacco producers voted against crop controls for 1939, with only a 56.8 percent approval in the December referendum. Most of the resistance came from small independent growers. In Wilson County, where there were large allotments and a 70 percent tenancy rate, there was a 74.6 percent vote for control.[55]

Immediately after the defeat of tobacco control some Wilson County farm leaders predicted that farmers would have difficulty obtaining farm credit due to uncertainty of tobacco prices for 1939. AAA officials also feared that farmers would increase crop acreage to such an extent that prices would be hurt. Growers did produce a 40 percent increase in the 1939 flue-cured crop, and prices opened on the New Belt at 16 cents per pound averages. By August 31 Wilson Farm Bureau members called for an early referendum on crop control for 1940.[56]

With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, Imperial Tobacco Company removed its buyers from the U.S. market on September 8. The British already had adequate stockpiles

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[55] Badger, Prosperity Road, 158-69; Hoover, "Economic Resources," 348.

[56] The Wilson Daily Times, Dec. 12, 18, 1938; Hoover, Economic Resources, 348; Badger, Prosperity Road, 179.

of leaf and wanted to save their foreign exchange for war materials. With the loss of the British market, fear of still lower prices gripped producers. After polling its members and clearing the warehouse floors of leaf, the president of the United States Tobacco Association closed the flue-cured markets until "a satisfactory solution" could be arranged. Seizing the opportunity, John Hutson, assistant administrator of the AAA, promoted an immediate referendum of growers to decide on crop control for the 1940 crop saying, "I don't think that you can get much for your tobacco until you decide about next year's plantings."[57]

Still unsure of the British position, the AAA directed farmers toward a vote on tobacco control in 1940 using only acreage restrictions and eliminating a quota on pounds sold. In an educational campaign to persuade farmers to vote for control, AAA officials could only speculate on what might be done about the loss of British buyers. The tentative plan called for the United States government to purchase the leaf for Imperial under the Commodity Credit Corporation. The government would redry the tobacco, store it, and provide the British an opportunity to repurchase the leaf during a specific

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[57] The Wilson Daily Times, Sep. 9, 1939; Badger, Prosperity Road, 179-80.

period for a set price.[58]

After the low prices in the fall of 1939, Wilson County farmers, like others across the tobacco belt, eagerly supported the campaign for 1940 controls. In a September 1939, meeting local farmers voted to send a resolution to the AAA for a three to five year control plan rather than the yearly one proposed. As the October referendum approached, Wilson business leaders as well as farmers fully promoted tobacco control. County Agent J. O. Anthony, Lester Rose of the Wilson Chamber of Commerce, and W. A. Lucas, local attorney, all participated in promotional meetings. Local leaf dealer James I. Miller enticed area farmers with the probability that Wilson markets would soon open if crop control was endorsed. But even without the community efforts, local farmers were eager for a control program. On October 5 growers in six states voted 203,409 to 23,016 in favor of tobacco crop control. In Wilson County almost 98 percent of farmers voted for the program.[59]

Anticipating the opening of the market, farmers began transporting tobacco to warehouses as soon as the control program passed. By the time of the first sales on October

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[58] The Wilson Daily Times, Sept. 12, 21, 1939; Badger, Prosperity Road, 182-83.

[59] The Wilson Daily Times, Sept. 16, 22, 25; Oct. 6, 1939.

10, farmers had an estimated six million pounds of leaf on warehouse floors in Wilson, perhaps the largest amount ever for the market. An additional 2,500,000 pounds sat on trucks in streets of the warehouse section and beyond. Average prices ranged from 15 to 17.5 cents per pound, no higher than before the holiday. But in spite of the prices, farmers were pleased to have the market operating again. The whole community shared their feelings. With the market opening, tobacco factory workers went back to work, and Wilson merchants did the "first thriving business" in a month's time.[60]

By the market's opening date the AAA had signed an agreement with the Imperial Tobacco Company to purchase leaf from the Commodity Credit. The results did not immediately affect prices. Flue-cured prices averaged only 14.9 cents per pound in 1939, although the Wilson market average was higher, at 16.58. In spite of prices, total receipts for farmers were higher than the previous year due to increased production. A 40 percent reduction in tobacco acreage in 1940 produced prices of only 16.4 cents per pound, but growers endorsed a three-year program in July 1940 as the Wilson farmers had suggested. In November 1940 growers got their base period changed from 1919-28 to 1934-38, increasing parity prices around 25 percent. By 1941 reduced tobacco inventories increased

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[60] Ibid., Oct. 10, 1939.

tobacco prices to an average of 28.1 cents per pound.[61]

With the vote for 1940 controls, growers indicated that they were convinced that the government should remain involved in the production of tobacco. In spite of low prices in the following years, farmers supported crop control. Their decision had evolved out of a fifty-year period of failed attempts at production and marketing controls. In 1880 when planters considered tobacco as a feasible crop for eastern North Carolina, they hoped for crop diversity and stability absent in the production of cotton. Although tobacco remained "the crop of choice" for many farmers in Wilson County, prices fluctuated with world demand and crop production. While tobacco farmers joined together to fight the manufacturers and the warehousemen, their efforts remained ineffective for the most part. Their adversaries were well-organized and had ample financing and community support, while farmers remained independent and divided over the issues of marketing and crop control.

Government intervention in the 1930s appeared to provide the answers growers sought, although they remained skeptical throughout the decade. With low crop prices in 1933, growers pushed the AAA toward tobacco controls for

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[61] Badger, Prosperity Road, 188-94; Hoover, Economic Resources, 348-51; The Wilson Daily Times, July 9, 22, 1940; July 19, 1949; Aug. 15, 1951.

1934, and by 1935 enticed most producers into the program. Increased prices reduced farm foreclosures, and tenant displacement began to subside. In Wilson County the number of tenants declined from 3,750 in 1930 to 3,316 in 1935, an 11 percent drop, but the worst of displacement occurred before crop controls began.[62]

Although the Supreme Court ended the 1933 crop controls, farmers continued to maintain production restrictions for several years under the Soil Conservation Act. By the time Congress passed the second Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1938, farmers were less concerned about tobacco prices and felt restricted by new poundage and acreage quotas. Although they voted in crop controls for 1938, farmers did not endorse the program for the next year. But the effects of wartime shipping and overproduction reduced prices and scared producers back to the protection of crop controls in the 1940s.

By the 1940s Wilson County landowners and tenants were comfortable with government intervention. The decisions to include government involvement in tobacco production made by tobacco farmers during the 1930s provided stability of prices, production methods, and labor arrangements, continuing the Wilson County tobacco culture for many years to come.

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[62] Sixteenth Census, 319.

CHAPTER 7

SLOW CHANGE ON THE FARM: 1940-1995

When tobacco producers voted in controls for the 1940 crop, they initiated continuous approval for government involvement in the production of tobacco. The combination of government control and the lack of mechanization preserved many aspects of the pre-war tobacco culture for another forty years. The allotment system initiated in 1934 froze the tobacco base, limiting the crop to the same farms on which it grew in 1933. Tobacco control provided a monopoly of production for owners of allotments, but also kept the crop on numerous small farm units with the tenant-sharecrop labor system.

Through the 1950s few labor-saving methods existed on tobacco farms where landlords were often unwilling to invest in tractors. With changes in the tobacco program in the 1960s, farmers began to lease and transfer tobacco allotments within county limits. The opportunity to consolidate tobacco allotments allowed farmers to fully utilize mechanization needed on larger farm units. Leasing the right to grow the crop provided opportunities for retirement income for farmers and landlords who were unwilling to move into the mechanized stage of tobacco production, but it also freed tenants from landlord supervision. As farmers began to "rent out" tobacco

allotments, a new classification of tenants arose in eastern North Carolina. Tenants rented farms based on tobacco poundage but furnished their own equipment and financing. In the process more farm laborers became itinerant and more farm owners became absentees.

The initial purpose of New Deal tobacco reduction began to fade by the 1940s, yet tobacco producers hoped to maintain crop control on a permanent basis. Cigarette consumption rose during the war and flue-cured tobacco stocks continued to decrease. With tobacco reserves so low in 1942, the Secretary of Agriculture was not authorized to set marketing quotas. In spite of low inventories, Congress required that marketing quotas for flue-cured and burley tobacco continue for 1945-1946 to assure that land and labor would be available for food and fiber production. When war measures expired in 1946, growers were fearful that tobacco quotas would be abandoned for 1947, but they convinced Congress to continue the program on the premise that control was necessary to maintain adequate supplies of leaf for foreign sales.[1]

By 1946 arrangements began for permanent tobacco price supports. That year the government began purchasing tobacco selling below parity through the Flue-Cured Tobacco Cooperative Stabilization Corporation. A

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[1] Hoover, Economic Resources, 351-52.

cooperative made up of tobacco growers who contributed to the initial fund, the organization operated on borrowed funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation. The cooperative processed and stored the leaf until sales could be secured, then repaid the government loan. If a net profit resulted, cooperative members received the gains. With a system in place for adequate price support, tobacco control became a continuous agricultural program through the Agricultural Acts of 1948 and 1949.[2]

By the late 1940s tobacco farmers became comfortable with government protection of leaf prices. From 1944-1948 tobacco farmers experienced high incomes similar to the pre-World War I years. Price averages on the Wilson market ranged from 42.92 cents per pound in 1944 to 48.83 cents in 1948, double the 1938 average. With legislation to increase parity prices in 1948 and 1949, tobacco farmers achieved the highest parity of any other commodity. By 1949 the flue-cured tobacco acreage was 98.5 percent that of 1929-1933, but sold for six times its

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[2] Pierce, "Economic Adjustments," 93-94; Hoover, Economic Resources, 352-53; Charles Pugh, "The Federal Tobacco Program: How It Works and Alternatives for Change," in The Tobacco Industry in Transition: Policies for the 1980s, ed. William R. Finger (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1981), 16.

value.[3]

Government crop control also benefitted land prices. The control program limited tobacco allotments to farms with existing acreages in 1933, providing allotment owners with a monopoly on production. As tobacco prices increased, farmland values in North Carolina increased twice as fast as those of the rest of the nation. Although allotted acres amounted to small proportions of farm units, by 1945 it was commonplace to value a farm by its allotment and suitable tobacco land. Selling tobacco land for $1,000 to $2,000 per acre, owners "threw in" the rest of the land and buildings. The value of tobacco allotments became symbolic of the social and economic aspects of life in eastern North Carolina. When University of North Carolina student Betty Ray prepared her out-of-state friend to meet a North Carolina boy, she advised, "You look him straight in the eye and ask him 'What's your tobacco allotment, honey?'"[4]

The combination of good leaf prices and high land values minimized alterations in the structure of the tobacco farms in Wilson County. Through the 1940s tenancy

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[3] Prince, "Long Green," 275-78; The Wilson Daily Times, Aug. 15, 1951; Hoover, Economic Resources, 363; Pierce, "Economic Adjustments," 85.

[4] Hoover, Economic Resources, 357-60; Badger, Prosperity Road, 19-20; Pierce, "Economic Adjustments," 14; The Wilson Daily Times, May 5, 1994.

remained high, farms small, and mechanization low. County population shifts caused only minor alterations in labor conditions during the war years. Wilson's rural farm population declined from 51.4 percent of the total county population in 1940 to 41.5 percent in 1950. Job opportunities available during the war accounted for the move from the rural areas to towns. But in spite of a population loss, the numbers of white and black farm operators rose from 1940-1945.[5]

Population shifts in the 1940s actually benefitted day laborers who sought their own crops. When Robert Martin surveyed county farmers in 1947, he found that war-time labor shortages escalated the tenant/share arrangement. Landlords had to offer day workers a crop to insure that labor remained available at critical times. Laborers reported that "anybody can get a crop now-a-days." Only Wilson County workers without a family to provide help remained as day laborers.[6]

As late as 1954 Wilson County tenancy rates remained just over 75 percent of farm operators. During the 1940s as better applications of fertilizer on the most suitable

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[5] Statistical Service Center, County Population Trends: 1790-1960, 103;U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture: 1954 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1954), 76-77.

[6] Martin, "Participation in the AAA," 285.

tobacco land created higher yields per acre, local landlords increased their tenant units to accommodate increased production. As Wilson County tobacco yields rose from 947 pounds in 1940 to 1,519 pounds per acre in 1951, farm units also rose. It was not until 1954 that farm numbers dropped below the 4,000 level to 3,919.[7]

The small size of Wilson County farms restricted the practicality of mechanization. When Herman James assessed mechanization in Tidewater North Carolina in 1949, he concluded that a farmer needed forty acres of cropland to make acquisition of a tractor economically practical. Most Wilson County farm units were far below the needed crop acreage to utilize a purchased tractor. Average farm sizes rose to 48.8 acres by 1940, dropped slightly to 42.5 acres in 1945, but evened out at 49.4 acres in 1954. But Pierce found that the average crop acreage for single unit farms in Wilson County in 1948 was only 23.4 acres. The rest of the farm consisted of woods, pasture, and idle land. The reality was that many farm units in Wilson County were not even economical for the existing work animals. In 1948 over 80 percent of Wilson County farm units in the Pierce study had two or more mules. Two mules were sufficient workstock for a farm with thirty-

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[7] Census of Agriculture: 1945, 36-37, 54. Daniel, Breaking the Land, 256-57; Pierce, "Economic Adjustments," 60; Census of Agriculture: 1954, 76-77.

five crop acres, and one mule could work eighteen. Since Wilson County farm units fell between the two land sizes, farmers found it necessary to keep more workstock than necessary.[8]

During the 1940s and 1950s many farm units in Wilson County remained similar to those of the pre-World War II era. While tenant numbers remained high, landlords were reluctant to change cropping systems, rental arrangements, or farm machinery. Tractor numbers in Wilson County jumped from 73 in 1940 to 275 by 1945. Some landlords bought tractors during the war years to attract top quality croppers in a period of labor shortages. By the late 1940s, 53 percent of Wilson farms made use of hired tractor work. In 1954 tractor numbers were up to 2,042 in Wilson County, but many farmers operated without them. At a transitory stage of farm technology, tobacco farmers tended to use tractors for land preparation, maintaining workstock for planting and cultivation. Wilson County had 2160 farm units without tractors in 1954; 1186 had both workstock and a tractor; and 622 farms used only tractors.[9]

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[8] Census of Agriculture: 1945, 36-37; Census of Agriculture: 1954, 68-69; Pierce, "Economic Adjustments," 176-77, 222; James, "Effects of Mechanization," 126-27.

[9] Pierce, "Economic Adjustments," 178; Census of Agriculture: 1954, 54, 102-3.

When a landlord added a tractor to the farm unit, there often was no increase in crop size, since the production of tobacco resisted mechanization. Although the cultivation of both cotton and corn were rapidly becoming mechanized by the 1950s, tobacco production remained labor intensive beyond the seed-bed preparation. Farmers were willing to trust their secondary crops to the mass production techniques of tractor equipment, but continued to use mules to cultivate tobacco. Extensive hand labor required at various periods of the cultivation and harvesting of the crop made the move to tractor power impractical. Many landlords preferred to keep tenants occupied with mule-drawn equipment in order to keep them around for other labor intensive jobs. Others were fearful that a tractor in the hands of tenant labor would injure the delicate and costly tobacco crop.[10]

One-row tractors gradually mechanized the tobacco production in Wilson County, but farmers kept mules and mule equipment until the 1960s. When Fred Barnes' stable burned, costing him his mules in 1946, the Wilson County farmer replaced the team. The family's tractor, a one-row Farmall, did not arrive until the next decade. The reality was that a man and a mule could only turn over two acres in a ten hour day, while a small tractor could plow

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[10] Pierce, "Economic Adjustments," 12; Ratchford, "Rental Agreements," 291, 354.

7.5 acres. By the late 1950s as mules died of old age, farmers often never replaced them. There were 5,074 horses and mules on Wilson County farms in 1950. By 1964 there were only fifty-seven.[11]

The replacement of workstock with tractor power and the use of chemical sucker controls in the 1960s reduced the need for hand labor throughout the growing season. As tobacco labor became more concentrated during the six to eight weeks of harvest, changes occurred in farm units in Wilson County. Between 1954 and 1964 farm numbers dropped 45 percent, farm sizes increased from 49.4 acres to almost 79, and percentages of tenancy declined to 65.4 percent. Program cuts in tobacco acreage, the institution of the Soil Bank Program, and reductions in rural farm populations, all contributed to the consolidation of farm units, but improvements in technology and government controls in the 1960s probably escalated the changes most of all.[12]

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[11] Emily Jean Barnes, interview by the author, April 18, 1995, Wilson, N.C.; James, "Effects of Mechanization," 87-88; Census of Agriculture: 1954, 118-19; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture: 1964 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), 384-85.

[12] Charles K. Mann, "The Tobacco Franchise for Whom?," in Finger, Tobacco Industry, 40; Census of Agriculture: 1954, 68-69, 76-77; Census of Agriculture: 1964, 282-83, 308-9; Daniel, Breaking the Land, 260-62.

By the 1960s it became harder for farmers to employ adult male laborers typically used in tobacco harvests. As the supply of workers slowly declined, farmers increased their use of women, children, and the elderly to harvest the tobacco crop. To attract and accommodate the available labor supply, both farmers and manufacturers developed a variety of equipment to ease the back-breaking field work at harvest. Beginning in 1954 manufacturers offered a double-decker tobacco harvester. The canvas-topped contraption allowed croppers to remain seated while priming leaves on the first level. A conveyer belt moved the leaves to the second level, where workers looped the tobacco on conventional sticks. Propelled by its own motor, it was easily stuck in wet ground, had a tendency to tip over in hilly fields, and eliminated few, if any, laborers.[13]

As a more practical and less expensive adaptation of the early harvester, farmers developed tractor-pulled devices with seats for primers by the 1960s. Still appropriate for young and elderly laborers who worked under cover of a canvas top, the harvester required the transfer of the loose leaf to trailers which were then pulled to the barn. Farmers using this arrangement could

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[13] John Fraser Hart and Ennis L. Chestang, "Rural Revolution in East Carolina," Geographic Review 77 (1978): 443-47.

use the traditional hand looping system at the barn or could speed up the process with an automatic sewing machine. Popular from the 1960s to the 1980s, the automatic looper hastened the barn work but had to be supported with more workers in the field. As trailers loaded with tobacco arrived from the field, workers removed the leaf and placed it on a conveyor belt where the machine stitched it around sticks.[14]

The introduction of labor-saving equipment fueled the need to consolidate farm units at a rapid rate by 1960. Under pressure from tobacco farmers, in 1961 Congress enacted legislation allowing existing allotment owners to lease and transfer allotments to their own farms within the same county. Although there were discussions and attempts to allow transfer across county lines, New Belt allotment owners feared large influxes of Piedmont acreage, decreasing the value of eastern allotments. The 1961 legislation restricted transfer to no more than five acres of allotment from a farm and required that the full allotment be planted on the parent farm once every four years. By 1966 further legislation ended the five acre limits.[15]

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[14] Daniel, Breaking the land, 262-63.

[15] Charles Kellogg Mann, Tobacco: The Ants and the Elephants (Salt Lake City, Utah: Olympus Publishing Co., 1975), 65-70; Pugh, "Landmarks in the Tobacco Program," in

In 1965 farmers themselves substituted poundage control for acreage limits. Improved fertilizers and the use of sprays for sucker control both increased tobacco yields by the early 1960s, making acreage control less effective. Farmers realized that emphasis on tobacco yields was resulting in declines in quality and increasing stocks in stabilization warehouses. To correct the situation, by 1965 flue-cured growers voted to change the allotment system from acreage to poundage. To account for poor harvests, farmers were allowed to sell up to 110 percent of their quotas if they did not make their allotted pounds the previous year.[16]

A third major alteration in tobacco production during the decade of the 1960s eliminated tied tobacco on the warehouse floor. While North Carolina growers had always tied their flue-cured leaf for sale, the Georgia-Florida producers sold tobacco in loose-leaf form. The process of tying tobacco was both time-consuming and expensive for farmers, delaying producers from getting their leaf on the market. By the 1960s the extra work was no longer necessary for tobacco processors. Lobbying from both producers and warehousemen extended loose-leaf sales to

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Finger, Tobacco Industry, 34.

[16] Mann, Ants and the Elephants, 59-60, 82-84; Pugh, "Landmarks," 35.

all flue-cured belts in 1968.[17]

A revolution in harvesting and curing methods awaited changes in tobacco production and marketing. As early as the 1950s researchers attempted to develop a mechanical tobacco harvester which could prime leaves from the tobacco stalk. A mammoth machine driven by one worker, it was the major breakthrough in labor reduction at harvest. Yet attempts to market the machine in the early 1960s were failures. Farmers found the machine wasted too many tobacco leaves and was economically impractical. With leaf losses between 5-8 percent, the harvester was costly for most farmers counting tobacco poundage. Also studies showed that a farmer needed over forty acres of tobacco to make the mechanical harvester worthwhile. With tobacco allotments at three to five acres, the machine was impractical for most farmers.[18]

Each of the changes in tobacco production and marketing in the 1960s made the mechanical harvester more feasible. With the lease and transfer of allotments, producers could consolidate their own crop with leased acreage to make the harvester economically practical.

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[17] Daniel, Breaking the Land, 263-64.

[18] Gigi Berardi, "Can Tobacco Farmers Adjust to Mechanization? A Look at Allotment Holders in Two North Carolina Counties," in Finger, Tobacco Industry, 48; Charles K. Mann, "The Tobacco Franchise For Whom," in Finger, Tobacco Industry, 41; Fite, Cotton Fields, 190-91.

Limited by suitable tobacco soil and rotational requirements, farmers often still had to work allotments on several different farms, but by 1972 the average flue-cured tobacco acreage planted on Coastal Plain farms climbed to 11.2 acres. In 1991 that average reached 34.1 acres per farm. Poundage control lessened farmers' worries about loss of leaves in the harvesting process, and loose-leaf marketing fit the mechanized harvesting methods.[19]

With the stumbling blocks out of the way, researchers and manufacturers took advantage of the changes in the tobacco program to make the mechanical tobacco harvester a practicality. By 1969 an improved tobacco harvester emerged through research at North Carolina State University and a grant from R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. In 1971 R. J. Reynolds and Harrington Manufacturing Company manufactured the first successful mechanical harvester.[20]

As researchers developed harvesting aids, they also redesigned the traditional tobacco barn. Flat-top metal bulk barns held twice the tobacco of old stick barns and

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[19] Annette L. Clauson and Verner N. Grise, Flue-Cured Tobacco Farming: Two Decades of Change (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1994), 3-4; Mann, "Tobacco Franchise," 41.

[20] Ibid., 42.

were far more energy and labor efficient. Mass produced, then transported to the site, they were fully automated for precision curing using forced air. Most importantly, use of bulk barns cut labor drastically by eliminating the task of tying tobacco bundles onto sticks. With bulk curing, workers placed armfuls of tobacco into metal racks, then clamped the leaf in place. One worker could easily slide the racks into the barns. The new barns could be used with traditional harvesting methods, but they complemented mechanical harvesting best of all. The change to loose-leaf marketing boosted barn sales, since farmers could empty their racks in tobacco sheets and haul the cured leaf to market the next day.[21]

The world of mechanical harvesters and bulk barns did not affect many farmers immediately. Most producers only gradually eased into mechanization. In Wilson County a few farmers still used mules to haul the leaf out of the field until the early 1970s, and by the 1990s walking primers harvested leaves just as their grandfathers did in the 1880s. But during the 1960s many farmers began to alter traditional harvest methods, using a combination of harvest techniques and equipment to make the work easier. In 1972, 92 percent of flue-cured tobacco producers used traditional methods to harvest and barn their tobacco

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[21] Hart, "Rural Revolution," 446-47; Mann, Ants and the Elephants, 62.

crops; that number had dropped to 2 percent in 1991. Over the years farmers substituted various labor-saving equipment when financially possible. Small growers still used available family labor and either walking or riding primers. Practically all Coastal Plain growers used bulk curing barns by 1991. Although not completely mechanized, tobacco farmers using a mechanical harvester could reduce their harvest labor to a possible five people. In 1991, 27 percent of flue-cured producers used a combination of mechanical harvesting and bulk barns.[22]

As they mechanized, tobacco farmers cultivated larger farms. Significant declines in Wilson County farm numbers indicate a dramatic consolidation of farm units. The 2,187 farms in 1964 shrank to 1,118 in 1978, and down to 371 by 1992. The average farm size increased accordingly from 78.9 acres in 1964 to 365 acres in 1992.[23]

The influx of machinery and the opportunity to lease and transfer tobacco allotments changed the labor environment in the Wilson County tobacco culture creating a new breed of both landlords and tenants. By the 1960s

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[22] Daniel, Breaking the Land, 263; Clauson, Tobacco Farming, 23.

[23] Census of Agriculture: 1964, 283; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture: 1978 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981), 691; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Agriculture: 1992 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994), 174.

many of the farmers growing tobacco when crop controls began in 1934 were reaching retirement age. For them, the lease and transfer program provided alternative farming arrangements. They could lease out all the tobacco for the going price and still cultivate other crops on their land, or they might choose to rent out the entire farm and retire. With the move to expensive equipment by the 1960s, many farm operators chose these options rather than invest in new machinery. A 1980 study of Greene and Wayne County allotment holders who were no longer tobacco producers found that the typical leaser was sixty-three years old. Although the majority had retired from farming, fewer than one-third indicated that retirement was their only reason for renting their allotments. Most stressed that production costs and expensive equipment were important leasing factors.[24]

The ability to lease tobacco allotments has provided income for those other than retirees in recent years. In many cases descendants of tobacco farmers, unwilling to sell the "home place" where they grew up, continued to lease out the allotment. In other cases utility companies, banks, and churches had acquired land with tobacco allotments. By the early 1980s a government study

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[24] Census of Agriculture: 1945, 54; Ratchford, "Rental Agreements," 317; Thigpen interview; Berardi, "Can Tobacco Farmers Adjust?," 51.

indicated that 51 percent of the tobacco leasholders were people or organizations who never had planted or intended to plant tobacco, yet received rental fees for the poundage. To ward off criticism of allotment practices, tobacco state congressmen negotiated a 1982 bill permitting the sale of allotments within county lines to active farmers and forcing nonfarming organizations to divest themselves of tobacco allotments. In addition the bill all but eliminated government funding of the tobacco price support by transferring the costs to active tobacco farmers.[25]

The 1982 legislation did not eliminate the many second and third generation allotment owners still benefiting from their inherited tobacco poundage. The average North Carolina flue-cured allotment of nine acres yielding around 20,000 pounds was worth $10,000 at the 1995 Wilson County rental rate of 50 cents per pound. Wilson County twins Ernestine Gardner Taylor and Christine Gardner Gay, now in their seventies, have been beneficiaries of inherited pounds from their parents' land, although they themselves have never farmed. Although Gay credited her ownership of a Lincoln Town Car to her income from leased tobacco pounds, not all allotment holders are that well-off. Many small farm owners consider their tobacco allotment to be a retirement

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[25] Daniel, Breaking the Land, 269-70.

investment and a supplement to Social Security payments.[26]

By the 1990s many area farmers accepted the lease or purchase of tobacco allotments as a part of their operating expenses in order to have enough tobacco pounds to maintain their income levels and equipment requirements. Costs of leasing and purchasing varied with the prospects of tobacco's investment potential. Flue-cured rental prices fell during the mid-1980s, but rose again from 1987 to 1991. Prices reflected a number of factors: production costs, leaf demand and prices, and concern of producers and manufacturers about government programs. Rental and purchase rates varied by county, since quota can only be leased within that limit. In 1991 Coastal Plain rental rates were about 35 cents and purchase rates were $2.08 per pound. By 1995 Wilson County tobacco leased for around 50 cents and sold for at least $3.00 per pound.[27]

The combination of lease and transfer and high machinery and production costs has long since ended the system of "furnishing." Although most of the government financing in the New Deal legislation had little effect on

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[26] The Charlotte Observer, Sep. 27, 1995; Berardi, "Can Tobacco Farmers Adjust?," 56-57.

[27] Clauson, Tobacco Farming, 10; Kelly Carlton, interview by the author, Mar. 27, 1996, Wilson, N.C.

tenants, by the 1940s new programs addressed lending needs of both owners and tenants. As crop control proved itself, banking interests also opened their doors to tenants, backed by higher market prices and government parity. By the 1950s and 1960s with increased availability of alternative financing methods, more tenants began to arrange their own operating expenses. Freed of the old "furnishing" entanglements of former years, tenants could distance themselves from landlords.[28]

For a number of years, Tar Heel Farm Credit has been one of Wilson County's biggest agricultural lenders. Organized as an agricultural credit cooperative, its member-borrowers are eligible for patronage refunds, helping to reduce their interest rates. Securing loans with crop and equipment liens, the Wilson branch generally lends to farmers who rent part or all of their tobacco allotments. Farm borrowers often negotiate loans covering both living and operating expenses for a crop year, although the cooperative also deals in longer term loans for land and machinery. After the initial loan is approved, a phone call can transfer money into a farmer's

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[28] Daniel, Breaking the Land, 174, 267; Jack Temple Kirby, Rural Worlds Lost: The American South 1920-1960 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1987), 58; Franklin Vester, interview by the author, Dec. 7, 1995, Wilson, N.C.

account by the next day to cover checks. Farmers still repay loans when the crop is sold in the fall, but the interest does not begin until the farmer requires the money during the operating year.[29]

The transition to alternative financing methods created new tenant and share arrangements. Just as the ownership of a mule once placed farm tenants in better economic positions, ownership of farm equipment allowed more economic mobility. Often tenants with their own equipment received two-thirds of the crop sales and the landowner got one-third, a reversal from the traditional cropper arrangement. With increased income, many tenants made land purchases, if no more than a few acres, to create a permanent homestead. Having land enough for a house and a place to park the equipment, tenants removed themselves even further from the traditional labor system. Wilson County farmer Edgar Gardner farmed on shares for forty years, owning his equipment, his home, and the single acre they sat on. Farming on thirds, he furnished all the equipment and labor to cultivate over four hundred acres.[30]

Gardner's rental arrangements have remained prevalent into the 1990s. In 1993 thirty-three year old Bryan Lamm, the 1992 Wilson County Young Farmer of the Year,

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[29] Vester interview.

[30] The Wilson Daily Times, July 17, 1982.

cultivated 70 acres of tobacco and 386 acres of other crops. With his father as a partner, Lamm was representative of the new breed of tobacco tenants within the county. Tending 450 acres on seventeen farms in the county, the Lamms owned only seven acres of land, part of a farm tract divided up by inheritance from Lamm's grandfather. Like the Lamm family, a growing number of farmers plant tobacco allotments that they do not own. By 1991, 95 percent of Coastal Plain farmers rented all or part of their tobacco allotment. The figures include allotment owners who lease extra tobacco pounds as well as those who were either sharecroppers or tenants.[31]

At one time the size of the farm family helped determine the amount of extra labor needed. By the 1970s most tobacco farmers were using less family and exchange labor. As family sizes decreased and wives held down jobs outside the home, there were fewer family members available to work in the crop. The old method of exchanging labor with neighboring farmers ceased, as individual farmers increased their own acreage to the point that no time remained to "swap work." Coastal Plain farmers increased their hired labor from 80 percent in 1972 to 85 percent in 1991.[32]

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[31] The Wilson Daily Times, July, 17, 1993; Clauson, Tobacco Farming, 8.

[32] Ibid., 28.

As the rural farm population declined, farmers utilized different types of workers with labor-saving equipment. When better-paying "public work" became available, the industrious and able-bodied took advantage of a steady income. For awhile, farmers successfully recruited youthful urban workers from the area. Throughout the 1970s both urban and rural youth, black and white, in Wilson County found summer employment in the tobacco crop. Generally the hourly pay was above the minimum wage, and workers could often accumulate ten-hour days during the six-week harvest season.[33]

By the 1980s the labor system had again evolved to accommodate changing economic trends. As young workers found jobs in area businesses and schools began their year earlier, the farm labor force declined, and farmers found the remaining day laborers unacceptable. Many farmers like Jerome Vick became embittered with local residents who seemed unwilling to work: "North Carolinians hold steering wheels; they don't hold buckets. If you told a local worker to grab a bucket, you've insulted him." Bryan Lamm explained the difficulty obtaining workers for only seasonal labor: "It got to the point with local help--we didn't know if they were to show up or not, and they

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[33] Hart, "Rural Revolution," 451.

would come in and complain all the time."[34]

Like other farmers in Wilson County, Vick began using migrant workers by 1980 to harvest his crops of cucumbers, tobacco, and sweet potatoes. Lamm hired his first workers in 1986. Both men praised the work ethic of their Hispanic laborers from Mexico and Central America and made attempts to attract the same workers year after year. Lamm started planting cucumbers to provide more work for his seven migrant workers: "It used to be hard to find good labor. Now it's hard to find enough work for them to do."[35]

The need of a better income brought migrant worker Jacinto Mondragon to Bryan Lamm's farm. He summed up his reason for seeking work in Wilson County farm fields: "It's different here. There's more money." Most farmers have developed a wage system based upon the task. As a result, often workers can make higher wages if they can accomplish more tasks in a day. Vick claimed that his workers made an average of $7 an hour harvesting tobacco, although the average hourly rate for tobacco croppers in the Coastal Plain was $4.35 per hour during the early 1990s. Many migrants send much of their earnings home to

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[34] The Wilson Daily Times, July 17, Oct. 30, 1993; Aug. 20, 1994.

[35] Ibid.

family members, but pay a price themselves for their absence from their native lands. Mondragon missed his wife and children: "I've been married twelve years, and we've only lived together about two years. That's not right."[36]

Even with migrant labor and increased size of Wilson County tobacco farms, many are family run, if not family owned. Often more than two generations work in the farming enterprise. Eddie Thigpen took over the management of his father's Saratoga farm in the early 1990s, but the elder Thigpen continues to provide help whenever needed. Bryan Lamm and his father Bobby continue to work as a team, working rented land in various areas of the county. In both families, a third generation of youthful family members also fill in the work duties. No longer do children have the same daily chores to accomplish before and after school. Instead they fit school activities, ball practice, and beach trips in between tobacco labor. Farm wives and mothers often work off the farms, bringing in added income to the household, yet others also work within the farming enterprise. Lynda Lamm quit her bank job to help husband Bryan. She, like Margaret Thigpen, Eddie's mother, prepares meals and provides back-up support for various jobs throughout the

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[36] Ibid.

farm season.[37]

Changes in the Wilson County tobacco culture were slow from 1940 to 1960. Government control of tobacco acreage from 1933 to 1966 limited farmers from altering many of their production methods or labor agreements, keeping farms small and unmechanized. During the 1950s as farm owners began to utilize tractor equipment, tenant numbers began to decline. Just as government controls of the 1930s seemed to reduce change in the tobacco culture, the initiation of lease and transfer, poundage control, and loose-leaf marketing in the 1960s accelerated it. Able to consolidate tobacco acreage, farmers began to mechanize. Already easing out of old rental arrangements, remaining tenants began to seek alternative methods of financing and broke away from the traditional sharecrop agreements.

The combination of farm owners and rental "farm operators" revolutionized the tobacco production in Wilson County during the last thirty years. As landlords became less involved with the daily supervision of the agricultural operation, the farm operators initiated their own management decisions. Farming large holdings in many areas of the county, tobacco producers operated for maximum profit, facing high lease prices, equipment costs, and lending fees.

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[37] Ibid., July 17, 1993; Aug. 20, 1994.

The tobacco culture in Wilson County entered the mainstream of modern agriculture during the last thirty years. As farmers relied on machinery and migrant labor, the physical and social landscape of Wilson County has visibly changed: greenhouses have replaced the old plantbeds, stick barns are into disuse, and machinery and migrant labor work the fields. Although farming has become more of a business than a way of life as finances and lifestyles have changed, tobacco farm families still maintain many aspects of the traditional culture and continue to pass it on to the next generation.

CHAPTER 8

THE TOBACCO CULTURE: AN EPILOGUE

For Wilson County boosters in the 1880s, flue-cured tobacco symbolized hope for a new economy. Young editor Josephus Daniels, despairing of low cotton prices, eagerly latched on to the Piedmont crop as an agricultural addition for depressed farmers. Using the "New South" rhetoric of Henry Grady, Daniels promoted flue-cured tobacco as a chance for area cotton farmers to diversify their income. Those most able to experiment with tobacco were Wilson County planters with substantial land and crop holdings. Finding Coastal Plain soils well-suited for tobacco cultivation, they endured the difficulty of marketing their cured leaf beyond the county lines. But in 1890 with increased production of locally-grown tobacco, they initiated the development of warehouses and prizing facilities to market and dry the leaf.

By the 1890s Wilson boosters envisioned a Wilson County tobacco industry similar to that of Winston-Salem and Durham. There tobacco production and manufacture became a New South economic phenomenon led by "new men" like the Dukes, the Reynolds, and the Carrs. Not tied to the landowning agrarian class, these Piedmont tobacco entrepreneurs developed an aggressive business approach utilizing advertising techniques, rail and telegraph, and

big business tactics. They created a New South product, the cigarette, grown, marketed, processed, and manufactured in North Carolina. To county boosters, a similar tobacco industry in Wilson would offer hope of a balance between agriculture and industry for both rural and urban residents.

But Wilson was not Winston-Salem or Durham, and Wilson County tobacco planters were not "new men." Unlike the Piedmont tobacco entrepreneurs, they were planters at heart, seeking another crop to increase profits. Once they realized that they could produce flue-cured tobacco successfully, planters used the crop to expand their agricultural investments. The Coastal Plain soils were better suited for tobacco cultivation than those of the Piedmont, and planters already had the labor structure in place. They could use tobacco to diversify their farms, fitting it into their fields of cotton and corn. Satisfied that flue-cured tobacco could be both profitable and practical, many of the same planters invested in early marketing and processing. Their investments were extensions of their farming operations, much as antebellum plantation owners invested in cotton gins. Needing a local marketing facility, they organized a company and developed the first auction house in Wilson. Others built needed prize houses to preserve the newly purchased leaf until it could be shipped on to other areas for

manufacture.

In spite of tobacco marketing and processing, smokestacks for Wilson remained limited. Both tobacco marketing and processing was only seasonal, freeing workers to provide farm labor for many months. How serious Wilson's investors were in initiating tobacco manufacturing is debatable. The American Tobacco Company already was well-established long before the three cigarette factories began in Wilson, and by 1900 competition with the Trust was next to impossible. Due to the swiftness with which the companies sold out, it seems that investors were simply trying to create short-term enterprises for the purpose of resale.

Flue-cured tobacco production fit into cultural practices and labor arrangements similar to those of cotton and corn cultivation. The tenant-sharecrop system remained unchanged with tobacco production and, in fact, thrived as never before. Tobacco labor was even more intensive than that of cotton and could support more workers.

Seeking experienced tobacco marketing managers, planters attracted newcomers to Wilson County from outside the area. Just as they adopted the "golden weed" as a new crop, planters accepted many of the tobacco men on both a social and economic plane. Newcomers soon fit into the class structure as they married into planter families or

became planters themselves. By the time farmers began their revolt against low prices and questionable marketing in the 1920s, many of the new men were on tobacco boards of trade, the state legislature, or the local bank, and had power to maintain the status quo.

Most tobacco farmers felt that they were economically better off than cotton farmers, although high rates of tenancy in the county indicated that their situation was limited at best. When government intervention in tobacco production arrived in the 1930s, Wilson's agrarian society continued undisturbed. Government allotments granted tobacco rights to existing landowners, insuring a monopoly of production, and preserved the tenant-sharecropper labor structure, avoiding the drastic displacement of workers. High parity prices coupled with production increases in the 1940s made tobacco land an expensive investment for buyers and a profitable one for owners. Flue-cured tobacco continued to offer better economic gains than those of cotton.

Not until the decade of the 1960s did the structure of the tobacco culture diverge from its traditional form. The combination of declining labor, available machinery, and the ability to consolidate allotments, helped to create a new type of sharecropper and tenant. More like tenants found in the rice and wheat cultures, Wilson renters and sharecroppers finally merged with farm owners

as operators of plant greenhouses, large tractors, mechanical harvesters, and bulk barns, using a migrant labor supply.

In spite of tobacco health issues, Wilson County farmers found that tobacco weathered the price drops of other crops in the late 1970s. Although there were poundage reductions, there were also more farmers willing to lease tobacco to those seeking to grow it. More mechanization meant need for less labor, but apparel and textile industries were moving into the area and absorbed the available workers.

When Hart and Chestang proclaimed a "rural revolution in East Carolina" in 1978, they were optimistic that tobacco mechanization had not occurred until the area had a sufficient industrialized backup to employ local residents. Citing an increasing black population in eastern North Carolina through 1960, they noted that labor requirements in tobacco employed area blacks until they could be "integrated" into the industrial work force. Since the "boom in manufacturing in eastern North Carolina coincided with the mechanization of tobacco," they concluded that displaced workers had other job options.[1]

Since the 1960s Wilson aggressively sought industrialization through its Economic Development Council

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[1] Hart, "Rural Revolution," 457.

and other similar organizations. Through the years the county accumulated its share of low-wage apparel and textile plants. But there also have been higher paying industries, like Bridgestone/Firestone, which opened a massive plant in the mid-1970s and continued to expand until it employed around 1,600 people by 1991; Fortune magazine's "most-admired corporation," Merck Pharmaceutical; and the corporate headquarters of Alpheus Branch's 1880 creation, Branch Banking and Trust Company. These high wage establishments along with good tobacco profits gave Wilson County the 19th highest per capita income in the state in 1994.[2]

Yet Wilson County also held two other state records in 1994: the county was tied for the highest unemployment rate at 10.5 percent, and it also held the largest number of shotgun houses. The contradictions between income and unemployment point to the fragile attempts to maintain ample jobs in an area with traditional agricultural patterns of employment. In 1992 meat packing plant John Morrell and Company pulled up stakes and closed its doors, leaving 460 employees out of work. A 1993 Branch Bank and Trust study called for higher paying jobs in eastern North Carolina, yet in 1995 bank officials announced their merger with Southern National Corporation and the transfer of their corporate offices to Winston-Salem. The move

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[2] The Wilson Daily Times, Feb. 28, 1991; July 2, 1994.

meant the loss of the bank's highest paying jobs for the Wilson area.[3]

How well eastern North Carolina has really avoided the displacement of agricultural workers continues to remain a question surrounding high unemployment and loss of jobs. Pointing out the inadequacy of industrialization in the region, Linda Flowers depicted youthful workers in eastern North Carolina as "Throwed Away." She emphasized the low tax rate, the cheap and abundant labor force that attract often itinerant industries. Questioning if factory workers are better off than their tenant forbearers, Flowers wrote that "The land, at least, didn't pull up and move to Tennessee."[4]

Wilson County tobacco tenants did not have to fear that the land would leave them as it did in the cotton South. Through the benefit of government allotments, the tobacco production has remained profitable and orderly since the 1930s. That stability has preserved aspects of tenancy even to the present. In the 1990s, 23 percent of Wilson County farmers still work land owned by someone else. Into the third generation, Wilson County's largest

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[3] Ibid.; The Wilson Daily Times, Mar. 18, 1993; May 20; Aug. 1, 1994.

[4] Linda Flowers, Throwed Away: Failures in Progress in Eastern North Carolina (Knoxville: The Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1990), 184-86, 205.

landowners are descendants of the Cozart, Eagles, and Woodards. Sharecroppers and renters still work much of their land. These landlords have often let long-retired croppers remain rent-free in farm houses, especially when the land has been leased to farmers who have no need of the house. That paternalistic attitude has prevailed due to the stability of the tobacco culture.[5]

Most of the new generation of farmers live in neat brick homes throughout the county. It is difficult to tell which of the 489 full and part-time farmers are owners and which are renters or sharecroppers. Their farm equipment is large and expensive in either case. Equipment and land prices are what keep farmers within a small and declining group. Farm Credit manager Franklin Vester points out that most of the borrowers he sees were "born into farming." Even if they did not inherit land, they inherited equipment. Lack of inheritance has diminished the numbers of black farmers. Only twenty-six remained within the county in 1992.[6]

With the approach of the third generation removed from the Wilson County agriculture, tobacco farming is becoming less sacred to Wilson County residents as a

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[5] Census of Agriculture: 1992, 329; Bob Hall, director, Who Owns North Carolina? (Durham, N.C.: Institute of Southern Studies, 1986), 350.

[6] Vester interview; Census of Agriculture: 1992, 555.

whole. Landowners not born on but inheriting tobacco farms are the most likely to sell the allotment, if not the farm. As the association with tobacco as a culture declines, the desire to maintain the tobacco farm no longer remains. Farm sales in the 1990s are often dominated by land speculators who pay the price of the land based upon the tobacco allotment, then turn around and develop the road frontage and sell the remaining land to farmers.[7]

In recent years Wilson residents have had fewer associations with tobacco marketing and processing than ever before. New warehouse construction since the late 1930s moved outside the old downtown district. Although tobacco sales continue within the district, more sales activity remains on the outer edges of town, making it easier for residents to avoid trucks laden with leaf. By 1995 eleven auction houses operated within the county, but no longer do most of the owners reside along Nash Street. A few remain as Wilson residents, but more live outside the county than within. Many of the workers they hire are migrants who remain in town only for the tobacco season. Tobacco processors by the 1970s began to consolidate their holdings, reducing their numbers in Wilson County. By the 1990s three processing plants remained, employing over a thousand workers, still on a seasonal basis. The long-

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[7] Carlton interview.

established Tobacco Board of Trade still remains, led by long-time sales manager John Harris. But the existing board made up of the eleven warehouse owners and six leaf dealers do not maintain the power structure once held by the boards of the 1920s through the 1950s.[8]

By the 1990s Wilson was no longer the largest tobacco market in the world, only the largest in the United States. But tobacco still remains important, bringing in over $150 million on the 1995 market. Since 1989 Wilson has celebrated the fall market with the Golden Leaf Celebration. The opening of the market sometimes attracts Governor Jim Hunt, a native Wilsonian and tobacco supporter, and that is always a boost to local business. Farmers still postpone their biggest bills until the fall of the year, and farm tenants still hope to "pay out" when the tobacco is sold.[9]

Concern for the health of both smokers and nonsmokers has altered the local as well as the national concept of tobacco production. Local newspaper editors now waiver

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[8] Clark, "Reflections," 19-21; John Harris, interview by author, Mar. 28, 1996, Wilson, N. C.; The Wilson Daily Times, Sept. 1, 1992; Clark, "Processing Plants," 74, 79, 97, 119, 125; Employment Security Commission of North Carolina, Employment and Wages in North Carolina: 1994 (Raleigh, N.C.: Labor Market Information Division, 1996), 397.

[9] The Wilson Daily Times, Sept. 13, 19, 1995.

between denunciation of youthful smoking and praise for the opening of the local market. To outsiders the contradictions are quite evident, yet to many county residents who have or still obtain their income from tobacco allotment rents, sales of leaf, marketing, or processing, tobacco is a livelihood. To many, tobacco still means fertilizer and equipment sales, lending fees, and new truck sales in the fall of the year. Still others look back with nostalgia at years on the farm when community farmers swapped work and the end of tobacco barning meant an eastern North Carolina pig-picking.[10]

Wilson County farmers have learned to live with criticism of tobacco, fueled since the 1960s by health issues. But through the years farmers have struggled with the possibility that the crop is on the decline, as foreign leaf makes inroads in world markets and domestic leaf allotments continue to be reduced. Archie Ellis farms the old Tom Washington farm in Saratoga. Twenty years ago he grew 110 acres of tobacco where he now grows twenty-eight. Ellis' farm is typical of others in the county. In 1972 Wilson County farmers grew 12,400 acres of tobacco, but by 1991, only 9,875.[11]

To compensate for the loss of tobacco, many farmers like Ellis have diversified. Along with his corn and

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[10] Ibid., July 25, 1991; March 9, 1996.

[11] Ibid., May 1, 1993.

soybean crops, he built eight chicken houses. Livestock, never a major agricultural product in eastern North Carolina, has risen in the county in recent years, but so have complaints from rural residents. In 1995 the Walston Properties swine operation chose to phase out its business rather than face litigation from neighbors who complained about waste water from the business.[12]

Just as Wilson County farmers sought new crops a hundred years ago, they again are seeking diversification. Along with their crops of corn and soybeans, Wilson County farmers planted 9,738 acres of cotton in 1994. Not since the 1950s have area farmers produced similar cotton acreage. Others have moved into greenhouse plants, shrubbery, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, and collards. But these crops either do not produce the income that tobacco does per acre or would be over-produced if planted in amounts equal to tobacco. Other commodities such as blueberries, strawberries, or broccoli are already produced by other farmers across the nation.[13]

For Wilson County and eastern North Carolina, tobacco is the specialty crop. The nitrogen-poor soil, the climate, and the allotment system have provided the environment, both natural and man-made, creating a crop

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[12] Ibid.; Feb. 6, 1995.

[13] Ibid., May 1, 1993; Feb. 24, 1995; The Charlotte Observer, Feb. 18, 1996.

maintaining farmers' loyalty. Tobacco is called "the forgiving plant." Unlike many crops which require rain at critical periods of growth, the golden weed is able to tolerate extremely dry weather for long periods, holding in the field until moisture comes. The appeal of the crop to the area, its income, and nostalgia for past experiences keep farmers eager to plant tobacco.[14]

Tobacco farmers perceive tobacco as a livelihood, just as the planters did a century ago. But over the years the heritage of tenancy and poverty bestowed upon eastern North Carolina became intertwined with the economic and social benefits that the crop has provided the area. For those born and bred in tobacco producing areas, the tobacco culture still provokes feelings of nostalgia. When Wendell Berry of Kentucky talks about tobacco, he could be referring to Wilson County:

> The experience of growing up in a community in which virtually everybody was passionately interested in the quality of a local product was, I now see, a rare privilege. As a boy and a young man, I worked with men who were fiercely insistent on the ways and standards of their discipline as artists--which is what they were. In those days, to be recognized as a "tobacco man" was to be accorded an honor such as other cultures bestowed on the finest hunters or warriors or poets.[15]

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[14] The Wilson Daily Times, May 1, 1993; Feb. 24, 1995; Margaret O. Kirk, "In Praise of Tobacco," Inquirer (Aug. 6, 1989), 24-25.

[15] Wendell Berry, Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 54.

When E. L. Thigpen first heard the Surgeon General's Report in 1964 declaring tobacco consumption as a health risk, he commented," Tobacco is dead, but it will take a long time to have the funeral." Thigpen's observation has become the philosophy of Wilson County tobacco farmers. They plan to hang on as long as tobacco production remains legal and profitable.

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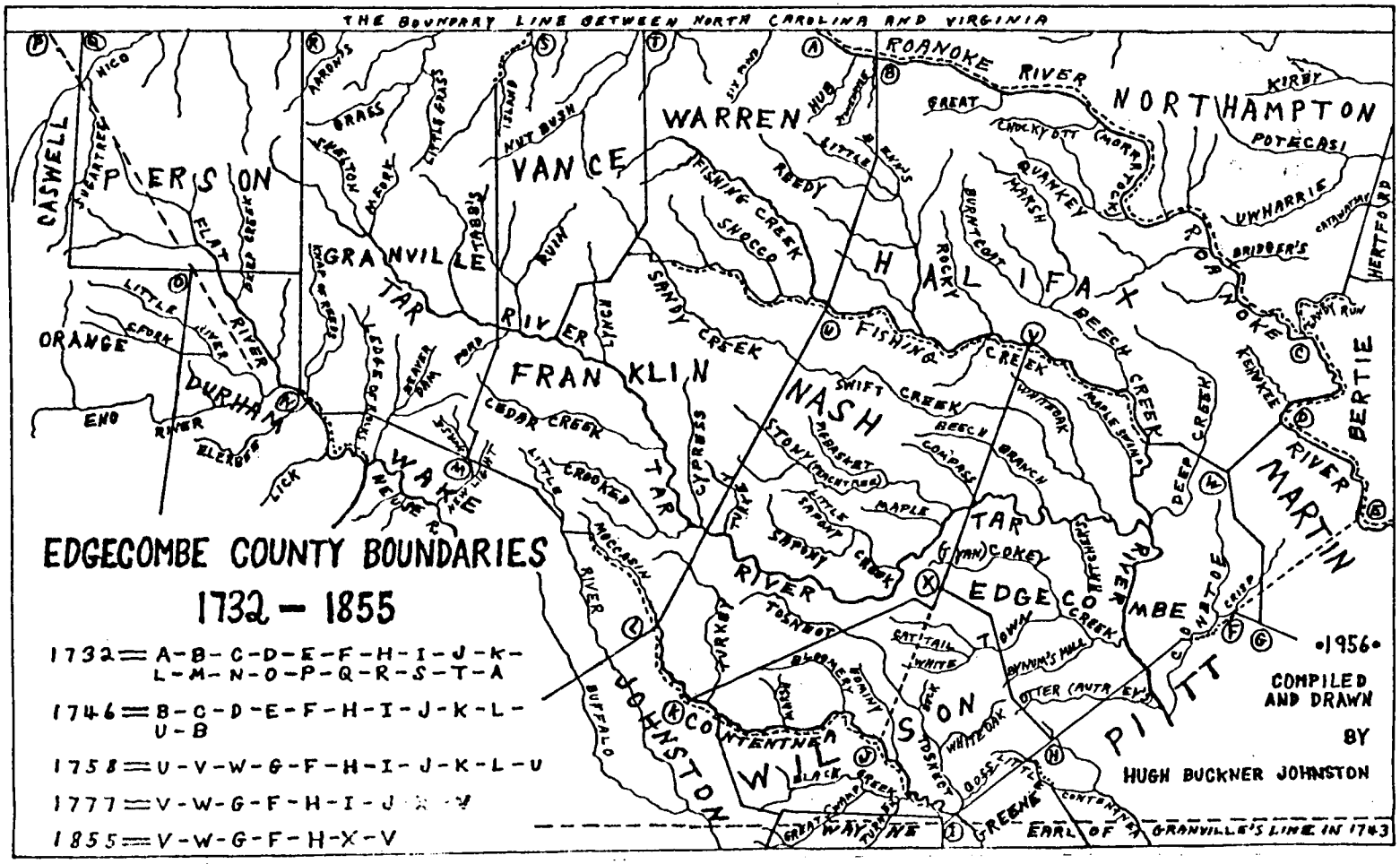
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APPENDIX

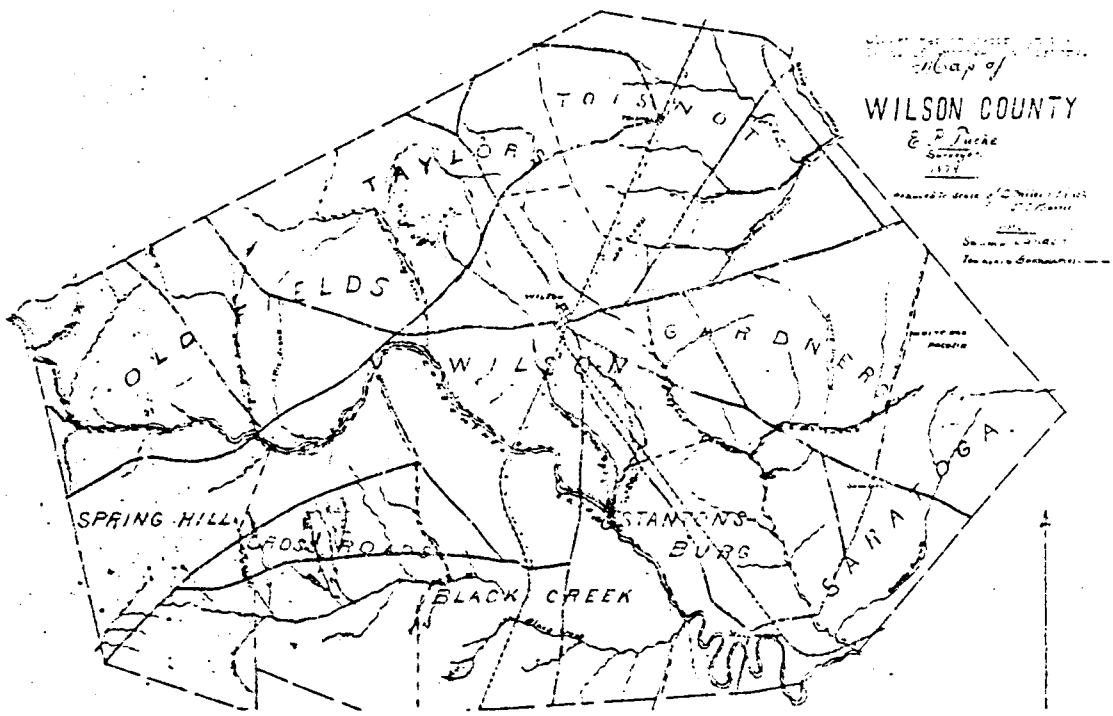
APPENDIX A



Source: Ruth Smith Williams and Margarette Glenn Griffin, Abstracts of the Wills of Edgecombe County, North Carolina, 1733-1856 (Rocky Mount, N.C.: Dixie Letter Service, 1956).

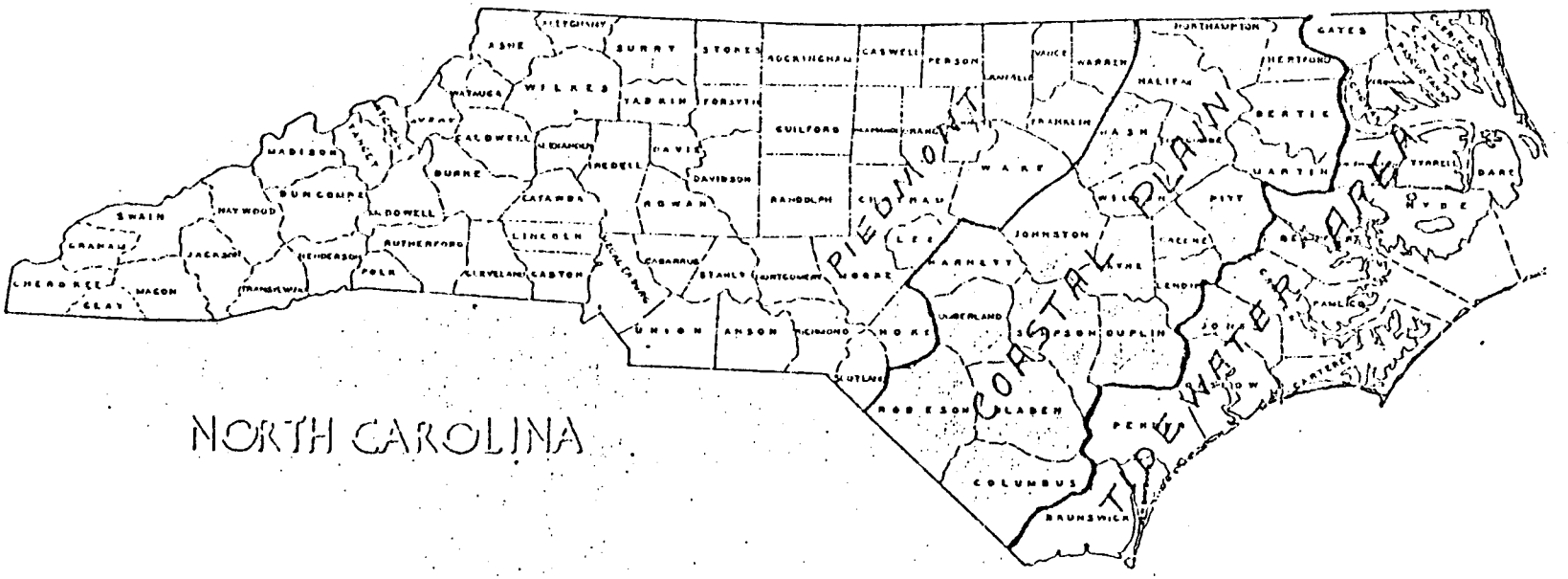
APPENDIX B

Wilson County Township Map
1879
by E.P. Tucke



Source: Kate Ohno, Wilson County's Architectural Heritage (Wilson County, N.C.,1981), 2.

APPENDIX C



Coastal Plain Area of North Carolina

Source: Charles Brice Ratchford, Rental Arrangements in a Developing Economy (Ph.D. diss., Duke Univ., 1951),76.

APPENDIX D

WOOODARD-BOSWELL RENTAL CONTRACT

This indenture made the 14th day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred & sixty six by & between Wilie Woodard of Wilson County & State of N.C. & Wilie Boswell of the County & State aforesaid. Whereforth: That the said Wilie Woodard has demised & let & he does hereby demise & let to the said Wilie Boswell his, the said Wilie Woodards tract of land known as the Journigan tract with all the privileges & appurtenances to the same belonging. To have and to hold the same to him the said Wilie Boswell for & during the term of seven years. And the following are the terms:- conditions & provisions of the lease:- The said Wilie Boswell shall cultivate all the open land for the year 1867, after that year the said Wilie Boswell may if he wishes, can change the crop fences or make new ones for pastures but is not to allow any more of the land to lie uncultivated than is necessary & the said Boswell shall plant all the marsh or swamp lands in corn every year & shall pay one third of the corn one third of the fodder one fourth of the cotton & one fourth of the small grains raised on said land & not to plant more than ten acres in cotton & if he should plant more than ten acres in cotton he shall pay one third of the said cotton crop & the said W Boswell shall have two acres for a potato patch & garden free fromcharges & the said W Boswell shall put the plantation in good order & keep good and lawful fences on the premises &keep the ditches open & in good order & all necessary repairs to house & plantation & the said W Boswell may cut or use any timber north of a Small Branch the dividing line between said Woodard & A G Brook that may be necessary for repairing of house & plantation & for fire wood. And in case of death of either of one the parties this lease shall terminate The said W. Boswell shall not make or Suffer any waste of the premises but he shall during said term promptly pay all rents & keep the premises in good order & deliver up the same to the said Wilie Woodard at the end of the term in good order fire & unavoidable casualties excepted. Said Willie Woodard engages that said Wilie Boswell shall quietly enjoy the premises during the saidtm free from the adverse liens of all persons. If the said Wilie Boswell shall neglect to make any payment of rent within a reasonable time after harvesting said crop or refuse to fulfill any condition herein on his part contained for the term of thirty days after the said Wilie Woodard that in renting have given him Notice of such neglect.

Therefore the said Wilie Woodard may enter the premises & expel the said Wilie Boswell therefrom & at hispleasure terminate the lease or let the premises to some other person for the residue of the term & hold the said Wilie Boswell liable for all crop thereon, & all the conditions herein contained shall extend to & be binding on legal representations of the parties respectively as well as themselves. In testimony whereof the parties have hereunto set their hands & seals the date first above written in these presents.

Wilie Woodard
his
Wilie X Boswell
mark

SOURCE: Wilson County Record of Deeds. vol. 21, Wilson County Court House, Wilson N.C.

APPENDIX E

WOODARD-WEBB RENTAL CONTRACT

This agreement entered into by and between Jas S. Woodard of the county of Wilson and State of North Carolina of the first part & Gray Webb of the county and state aforesaid Whereforth that the said J S Woodard hath rented & by these presents doth rent unto the said Gray Webb a two horse farm a portion of his Felix Woodard tract of land lying on Contentnea Creek in the County aforesaid for and during the year 1868 The said Gray Webb yielding & paying unto the said Woodard as rent therefor one fourth of all the lint cotton, one fourth of the corn & fodder raised on the land composted & one third of the corn and fodder raised on the land not composted & all the cotton seed raised on the land, in the event the said Webb should not farm on the land of the said Woodard during the year 1869. should the said Webb farm on the land of the said Woodard during the year 1869, then the said Webb shall have all the cotton seed for the purpose of planting and composting. It is further agreed that the peas shall be saved by picking & it is mutually agreed by & between the said Woodard and Webb that the said Woodard shall & may have a lien upon the crop for all advances he the said Woodard may make to the said Webb either in Money, Provisions, farming utensils or otherwise during the year which advances shall not exceed in amount the sum of two hundred dollars. The said Woodard agrees to furnish the bagging & rope necessary to bale his rent cotton & whereas the said Gray Webb is firstly indebted to the said J S Woodard in the sum of one hundred & ninety eight dollars in Specie which sum of money is due to the said Woodard by the purchase on the part of the said Webb of certain Stock provisions & for agricultural purposes from the said Woodard & whereas the said Webb is honestly desirous of securing the payment of the aforesaid sum of money (which sum of money is due by note bearing even date with this writing as on reference to said note will more fully appear.) The said Webb in consideration of the promises hereby bargains sells transfers and conveys to the J S Woodard one bay mare & Mule Colt one ox & ox cart two horse carts all his hogs & cattle together with all his interest in his crop which he may produce on the two horse farm during the year 1868- To be voided nevertheless if the said Webb shall on or before the first day of January 1869 pay unto the said Woodard the said note of one hundred and ninety eight Dollars in Specie together with such other advances which the said Woodard may make to the said Webb during the present year. The said Woodard covenants and agrees that the said Webb shall have quick possession of the premises & the said Webb agrees that

he will keep the fences around the premises in good repair. In testimony whereof we the said J S Woodard & Gray Webb have hereunto set our hands and seals this the 6th day March 1868.

James S Woodard

Gray Webb

SOURCE: Wilson County Record of Deeds, Book 2, Wilson County Court House, Wilson, N.C.

APPENDIX F

AVERAGE PRICES OF WILSON TOBACCO AND COTTON PER POUND 1890-1929

	Wilson Tobacco	Cotton
1890	10.99 cents	8.59 cents
1891	8.59	7.24
1892	8.99	8.34
1893	7.72	7.00
1894	8.86	4.59
1895	9.77	7.62
1896	6.55	6.66
1897	7.96	6.68
1899	6.11	6.98
1900	7.43	9.15
1901	11.15	7.03
1902	10.90	7.60
1903	6.79	10.49
1904	9.90	8.98
1905	8.42	10.78
1906	10.71	9.58
1907	10.98	10.36
1908	9.84	9.01
1909	8.42	13.31
1910	10.77	13.96
1911	14.79	9.65
1912	19.88	11.50
1913	19.03	12.47
1914	13.38	7.35
1915	12.16	11.22
1916	20.22	17.36
1917	30.87	27.09
1918	36.03	28.88
1919	53.67	35.34
1920	21.61	15.89
1921	28.38	17.00
1922	29.94	22.88
1923	22.17	28.69
1924	26.68	22.91
1925	26.83	19.61
1926	26.86	12.47
1927	23.00	20.19
1928	20.42	17.99
1929	20.32	16.79

Source: Nannie May Tilley, The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 1860-1929 (Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1948), 354-55.

APPENDIX G

DISTRIBUTION OF DISPLACED TENANT FAMILIES

GREENE, NASH, WILSON COUNTIES

1920-1934

DATE DISPLACED	BLACK	WHITE	TOTAL
1920-1924	11	4	15
1925-1929	58	20	78
1930-1934	426	245	671
1929	31	10	41
1930	73	20	93
1931	100	54	154
1932	106	75	181
1933	72	40	112
1934	75	56	131

Source: Gordon W. Blackwell, "The Displaced Tenant Farm Family in North Carolina," Social Forces (Oct. 1934), 69.

VITA

Robert C. McAdams was born in Anderson, South Carolina on January 17, 1949, but attended the first nine grades of public school in Morganton, North Carolina, after his family moved to the area in 1955. After anther move with his family to Wilson, North Carolina, he graduated from Ralph L. Fike High School in 1967, then majored in Art Education and minored in English at Atlantic Christian College, graduating in 1971.

McAdams taught Art to ninth and tenth graders from 1971 to 1978 in the Wilson City Schools and in the Continuing Education program at the Wilson County Technical Institute from 1975 to 1980. During the 1981-82 school year, he taught English and Art at the Patterson School in Lenoir, North Carolina. From 1982 to 1984, McAdams returned to teach Art to students in kindergarten to seventh grade in the Wilson County Schools. Since 1984, he has taught in the Burke County Schools located in western North Carolina. Presently McAdams teaches at East Burke High School located near Icard, where he teaches U.S., World, and European histories in a Humanities program for tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders, as well as Advanced Placement history courses.