

Much of the region's wealth is concentrated in Brunswick County which, with its beach communities weighting the average, has a median home value (\$186,600) more than twice that of Bladen or Columbus Counties (\$81,800 and \$84,500, respectively). Brunswick's median household income is just over the state average, an estimated \$46,438. Roughly one-quarter of Bladen's and Columbus' population are below the poverty line. Columbus' is \$35,761, and Bladen's \$30,164.

Columbus and Bladen Counties are home to the Waccamaw Siouan Indians, a state-recognized tribe. Descended from the historic Waccamaw tribe, modern Waccamaw Siouan people are led by Chief Lacy Wayne Freeman. The tribal government is based in Bolton, Columbus County.

### Folklife traditions

The folklife fieldwork conducted by the North Carolina Folklife Institute in 2013 and 2014 revealed that Columbus, Bladen, and Brunswick Counties are home to numerous deeply rooted folklife traditions. In some ways the three counties' traditions intersect and form a regional folk culture. A community of bluegrass musicians, for example, is active in all three counties. In other ways, each community is unique and is distinguished by the richness of its special traditions.

There are many artists among the membership of the Waccamaw Siouan tribe of Columbus and Bladen Counties. In particular, quilters form a special artistic community. The legacy of late elder quilters including Lee Graham Jacobs and Missouri Young Jacobs lives on in today's quilters, who in turn share the tradition with new Waccamaw Siouan artists.

Residents of Columbus County carry on the region's agricultural heritage through the raising and preserving of important food crops at home. Whiteville resident Ruth King cans the fruits and vegetables that she grows in her home orchard and garden, and like many area residents also gathers the pecans that fall from her trees each fall. She sells her products, including her specialty watermelon rind pickles, at area farmers markets. Fellow Whiteville resident Linda Pham, though born and raised in Vietnam, has a heritage of gardening and cooking that has much in common with Ruth King's. Like King, Pham raises vegetables in her home garden; in Pham's case, though, the recipes in which she uses the fresh produce hark back to her Vietnamese heritage. Another resident of Columbus County, Elvira Jaimes of Hallsboro, carries on the culinary heritage that she learned in her native Guerrero, Mexico.

Because of its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, Brunswick County has a rich maritime heritage which is carried on today. Though the fishing industry has been in decline in recent decades, fishermen like shrimper Danny Galloway of Varnamtown

## Introduction

### About the project

In 2013 and 2014—with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, North Carolina Arts Council, and local partners including the Columbus County Arts Council, Arts Council of Bladen County, Brunswick Arts Council, members of the Waccamaw Siouan tribe, A Step Forward, and Wilmington's Centro Latino—the North Carolina Folklife Institute conducted extensive research into the folklife of Bladen, Brunswick, and Columbus Counties, North Carolina. The three counties, in the southwestern corner of the state, are home to deep traditions of craft, agriculture, maritime life, and music.

Three folklife fieldworkers conducted the documentation. Steve Kruger, Anna McLean Scott, and Chris Fowler interviewed more than two dozen area heritage-bearers, and created a photographic record of their work. Folklorist Sarah Bryan conducted archival research into prior documentation of the region's folklife. The results of NCFI's research are archived at the organization's Durham office, and are presented, in condensed form, in this report.

### Environment and demographics

The environment of the three-county region is profoundly shaped by water: by the Atlantic Ocean bounding Brunswick County to the south and east; by the Cape Fear and Waccamaw Rivers, flowing through Bladen and Columbus Counties, respectively; by Lake Waccamaw and numerous smaller Carolina bays; and by extensive swamps, including Green Swamp in Brunswick County. This environment has a major role shaping the region's folklife. The following pages include many examples of water-related traditions, including fishing, boat building, and net making.

Brunswick County, with its well known beach communities, leads the three-county region in population, with an estimated 115,000 residents in 2013. Columbus County is the next most populous of the three, with an estimated 57,000 residents, followed by Bladen County, with under 35,000.<sup>1</sup> Bladen County is the most ethnically diverse. Its population is approximately 55% non-Hispanic white, 35% African American, 7% Hispanic, and 3% Native American. Columbus County has a similar ethnic makeup, with approximately 60% non-Hispanic white, 31% African American, 5% Hispanic, and 4% Native American. Brunswick County is approximately 85% white, 11% African American, 5% Hispanic, and 1% Native American. The Asian population of each county is less than 1%.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau, [quickfacts.census.gov](http://quickfacts.census.gov), accessed March 22, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Percentages are rounded up to the nearest percentage point.

carry on the way of life led by generations before them. The art of traditional boatbuilding is still remembered here, and net makers like Gordon Winfree of Shallotte continue to supply fishermen with hand-sewn specialty nets.

Though the traditions of each community are diverse, the tradition bearers of Columbus, Bladen, and Brunswick Counties share a love of, and regard for, their cultural inheritance. By carrying on, teaching, and sharing their folklife traditions, area residents ensure the cultural richness of the region for years to come.

## Music

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Bladen, Brunswick, and Columbus Counties are home to many musicians and singers, representing a broad array of musical styles. During NCFI's research, fieldworkers met and interviewed area bluegrass musicians, and church musicians, as well as non-musicians who shared memories of congregational singing in their youths.

This region, and Brunswick County seemingly in particular, has a strong tradition of old-time and bluegrass string music. One of the most unusual banjo players field-recorded during the old-time music revival was a native of Brunswick County. Walter Raleigh Babson (1900 – 1987) was from the community of Ash, approximately halfway between Shallotte and Whiteville. Describing Babson's idiosyncratic music, Andy Cahan has written,

Walter's banjo technique encompassed so many components that an attempt to classify it would do little justice. In the most basic terms, he used two distinct styles: the frailing, or down-picking style, which he vaguely referred to as "strumming," and several forms of finger-picking . . .

These style descriptions are merely basic outlines of a banjo music that was complex and texturally variable, and would often be combined within a tune. His varied renditions and their experimental nature were in large part due to the absence of a significant banjo tradition in the area in which he grew up.

Another unusual embellishment was his finger tapping on the banjo head. He also developed an elaborate form of knuckle tapping, which he would do as a performance in itself. Using the knuckles and heel of one hand, Walter would tap out elaborate, syncopated rhythms on any available hard, resonant surface. He worked out this skill on his own, while still a young boy, rapping on a wooden matchbox while his brother danced.

Religious prohibitions on secular instrumental music seem to have made banjo and fiddle playing somewhat unusual around Ash. In the Babson family, however, were several musicians, including Walter's father Mike, also a banjo player, and his uncle Whitt, cousin Charles, and great-uncle Charles, all fiddlers. According to Cahan, "Walter recalled that to his knowledge, his family was the only one in the lower end of Brunswick County to have had a banjo."

Despite having followed his father in playing the banjo, Babson credited his father's playing with very little influence on his own repertoire or style. On the other hand,

Many of the songs in Walter's repertory were learned from his mother [Minnie Jane Ross Babson, b. 1881], who was remembered as a fine singer. Walter's sister Onnie Green (b. 1913) recalled: "...she sang all the time. One of the sweetest memories that I have of my mother and daddy: we lived in the

country—had a wood stove in the kitchen . . . Mama'd get up, put a fire in the stove, get that breakfast a'goin. And she was humming all the time that was going on. And Daddy would get up . . . and he'd keep a fire in that stove. Mama would sing. And he'd hit that bass (part). And we kids were lying in the bed and that's what we woke up to most of the mornings. And when Mama sang "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" you didn't lay there long, you got up!" Minnie Jane was also remembered as singing most of the hymns the children learned, as well as sentimental songs such as "Silver Haired Daddy of Mine," "The Faded Picture On the Wall," "When You and I Were Young Maggie," and "After the Ball."

In addition to members of his family, Babson was influenced by a banjo player from the Lockwoods Folly section of northern Brunswick County, Matthew Long (born 1847, and a veteran of the Civil War), and a singing hired hand named Shade Bullard. Later in life, he lived near Crusoe Island, and learned tunes from the musicians of that community.

A carpenter and woodworker, Walter Raleigh Babson lived at Wrightsville Beach in New Hanover County for the last quarter-century of his life. He was recorded by old-time musicians Andy Cahan and Brett Riggs, and the former's recordings are available on a CD issued by the nonprofit Field Recorders' Collective, *The Music of Walter Raleigh Babson (1900 – 1987)*.<sup>3</sup>

Since the days when Babson learned tunes there, the Crusoe community has continued to foster musical talent. Bluegrass mandolinist Jackie Brock was inspired to play music as a boy, when he would listen to his older relatives in Crusoe.

. . . there was several people in my family, grandfathers and uncles and what have you, that played instruments. Of course, they were not professionals by any means, but they had a good time and could play very well. Sitting around back when I was young, there won't many televisions or nothing, so the elderly people would get around of an evening on the porch and play music . . . So when I heard them boys a-playing, I could hear everything they done . . . And I [thought to myself], "If I had me an instrument I believe I could do what they do." So by the time I got in high school I got one. My granddaddy had a little Gibson guitar and he gave it to me . . .

First thing you know, at home, about everybody could play, and it didn't matter who come up, he would bring his instrument with him. And I just

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<sup>3</sup> Andy Cahan, notes to *The Music of Walter Raleigh Babson (1900 – 1987)* (Field Recorders Collective 313), [www.fieldrecorder.com/docs/notes/babson\\_cahan.htm](http://www.fieldrecorder.com/docs/notes/babson_cahan.htm), accessed August 21, 2014.

learned to love it to death. It filled my heart to set down with them boys and play music.<sup>4</sup>

Brock remembers that during his youth there were good banjo players in Crusoe, guitarists who played with flat picks and with finger picks, and a country steel guitar player whose influence in the community was such that his repertoire became widely popular there.

David Robinson—who has had a long music career, including appearances on the Grand Ole Opry and with famous country singers—now plays bass with Randy Hall and the Bluegrass Boys. His earliest days as a musician took place in his native Holden Beach.

Of course, Daddy had me in church, always had me in church, and I'd enjoy that music so much. And I said, "I believe I can do that." Got to messing with it, Daddy showed me a few chords, and then the first time I ever played in front of anybody, I actually played the mandolin. He showed me some chords on the mandolin, and I played in church that night. Just a little fellow.<sup>5</sup>

Another musical family in coastal Brunswick County are the descendants of Carson Varnam (1932 – 2008) of Varnamtown. Well known in the region as a fisherman, Carson Varnam was also a traditional musician. His daughter Gaye Varnam Fulford, a singer and songwriter, remembers her father's music from her childhood.

He played guitar, a little bit of banjo, a bit of harmonica. I'd sit on the porch with him when I was growing up—all his buddies would come over with their mandolins, doghouse bass, and we'd sit on the porch and play. It's a large part of who he was, I think is why I love it so much.

Fulford's grandfather Corbett Varnam was a musician as well, a banjo player in a style that sounds intriguingly like that of Walter Raleigh Babson. "Well, he'd pluck on it, knock on it a little bit. But it was an unusual type of playing." She also remembers hearing members of the local community play "The Crawdad Song" and "Cripple Creek," pointing to an established old-time and/or bluegrass tradition.

Fulford's sister has been the pianist at Dixon Chapel United Methodist Church in Varnamtown for more than 45 years. Gaye herself draws from her family tradition and childhood memories in her songwriting.

I've never had any aspirations to do grand things with it, it's just always been a part of me. So I've written songs off and on all my life, and it's always been

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<sup>4</sup> Jackie Brock, Tim Marlowe, David Robinson, and Frank Lear interview with Steve Kruger for the North Carolina Folklife Institute April 4, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

about either things that I feel passionate about, or things that have happened to me. That's always what sparks a song for me.<sup>6</sup>

In the Buckhead community, singer and songwriter Nadine Patrick also draws inspiration from her Waccamaw Siouan community and family heritage. Patrick's mother, Shirley Freeman, remembers of her own father,

... there was a group of men my daddy's age ... it was my daddy, Rogers Freeman, A. J. Jacobs, Cleo, Mr. Harvey Jacobs. They played guitars. Now, they weren't what you might say church-going people during the time that I remember, but there was a place in Bolton where they would go. And ... they'd gather down there, I guess play checkers, whatever—and they would have those guitars framming. I mean, they could play. And Mr. Harvey ended up playing in church. Now, you would have loved to have heard some of his music. He went at it hard. But now, he sang hard. But he was special.<sup>7</sup>

Patrick now performs Southern gospel music, and sings original songs in country and gospel styles. She has also performed original compositions at intertribal Indian unity conferences in North Carolina.

In Clarkton, a guitarist named Eladio [last name withheld at his request] came to the US from Mexico as a teenager in the early 2000s. In 2010 he had a religious experience that caused him to dedicate himself to playing Christian music. At a church retreat in Elizabethtown, he says, he prayed for guidance to help figure out his path in life, and promptly won a guitar in a raffle.

... I say, "God, tell me what you want ... how to [serve]." But when I'm coming out [of the retreat], I have a guitar ... I understand what He wants, you know. I understand. He wants me to play guitar in church. You know how some people read the Bible? That's good. I don't say nothing wrong. But my music is what he wants [me to] do, so that's why I play in church.<sup>8</sup>

The prominence of bluegrass in Southeastern North Carolina amply demonstrates that the style is not simply music of the mountains. Several bands are active in the area, playing at venues throughout the region. Among the favorite bluegrass gathering spots is Captain Hort's Pickin' Parlor. Al Milliken, the host at Captain Hort's, is a guitar and bass player. He hosts the monthly get-togethers in Shallotte, in a private warehouse that has been partly converted into a music venue. What

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<sup>6</sup> Gaye Fulford interview with Steve Kruger for the North Carolina Folklife Institute, February 13, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Shirley Freeman and Nadine Patrick, by Steve Kruger and Chris Fowler for the North Carolina Folklife Institute, January 24, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Eladio by Anna Scott for NCFI, 2013

started as a practice session among friends grew into a larger jam and performance series, with a potluck meal, attended by as many as 80 people.

Among the regulars at Captain Hort's is bluegrass guitarist and singer Bobby Curtis. Born in Charlotte in 1943, Curtis moved to his mother's native Columbus County when he was still a child. He took up music as a young man, at the encouragement of his wife's aunt.

I started back in the early '70s. I got interested in the music. I was laying across the bed and then I'd hear some of the local groups get on the radio and sing. And my wife's aunt, she had a guitar. And of course we went to the same church. And she would sort of ask me, "I want you to learn the guitar, I want you to learn to sing." [...]

And of course, my mother [Dottie Lee Curtis], she was a gifted pianist. She had a crippled thumb, but she was just gifted to the piano. And I sort of feel like that's where I got a lot of my music. But I always loved music, loved to sing. And of course when I got older I just started using my voice, like at the church, me and my wife singing with the piano and stuff like that. I got saved back in 1975. Of course that added a lot to my music. I was able to go out with my group and minister, you know, to people. Which I still consider that my priority in my music. [...]

Well, I got where the first song I remember, I come out here to my mother-in-law's house, and I set in that chair, and I had a cheap guitar. I've had a lot of cheap guitars in my early experience. One of them was a serious one. And I got in C-chord and played "Sweet Hour of Prayer." And I'll never forget, my mother-in-law said, "He's not too far from learning."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to gospel music, Curtis took an early interest in bluegrass. Columbus County falls within the musical sphere of influence of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, home to large country music theaters and other venues. Curtis and his friends began to attend a bluegrass festival in Myrtle Beach in the 1970s, and as his interest in bluegrass grew he was influenced by the playing of Charlie Waller and Lester Flatt. In addition to Flatt-style finger-picked rhythm guitar, he plays flat-picked rhythm guitar, and finger-picked lead. Curtis performs gospel music solo at churches, and at revivals and other community events, and plays bluegrass gospel as the leader of Bobby Curtis and the Jubilee Singers. *Interview with Steve Kruger for the North Carolina Folklife Institute, April 3, 2013.*

Bluegrass and gospel music go hand-in-hand for other bands in Southeastern North Carolina. Randy Hall and the Bluegrass Boys, whose members include Jackie Brock, Frank Lear, David Robinson, and Ted Marlowe, play both sacred and secular bluegrass at venues throughout the region. Talking about their informal get-togethers, mandolinist Jackie Brock says,

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Steve Kruger for the North Carolina Folklife Institute, April 3, 2013.



... the Bible says there's a time for all things. There's a time to go to church, and a time to play bluegrass ... Many a night when we form our little circle ... when we play and sing, I feel the presence of the Lord just like I do when I go to His house to play and sing. Anywhere the presence of the Lord is is His church. And we play those gospel songs just like we do in church. And there's times that we play [secular] bluegrass ... The Bible is full of love, and a good bluegrass song is full of love also.<sup>10</sup>

Bluegrass banjo player Phil Norris lives in the Hickmans Crossroads community near Calabash, and plays with the Hewletts Creek Boys. Though his grandfather played old-time clawhammer banjo (playing such tunes as "Little Black [sic] Jug," "Bile Them Cabbage Down," and "Soldier's Joy"), Norris himself was more strongly influenced by seeing Flatt & Scruggs on *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The engineer and former county commissioner is also the pastor of Andrews Chapel United Methodist Church, which he says has "quite a reputation ... for being musically inclined."<sup>11</sup>

Speaking about the music of Cedar Grove Church, in the African American Brunswick County community of Cedar Grove, Jesse Bryant says that there have been significant changes since his 1920s childhood.

Well, [back then] it was mostly everybody just sang together. Whereas now we have to have a musician, a choir director and all. But back at that time, the preacher would line a hymn, and everybody sing together ...

He'd probably say, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound/That saved a wretch like me/I once was lost but now I'm found/Was blind but now I see." Then the next thing he'd say, "Grace that taught my heart to fear/Grace my fears relieved/How precious did that grace appear/The hour I first believed." Something like that. Then we'd sing that. The last verse he'd say, "Through many dangers toils and snares/I have already come/It was grace that brought me safe thus far/And grace will lead me home."

Retired shrimper Harry Bryant is also a lifelong resident of Cedar Grove, born in 1935. During his growing-up years, he says, the family of Herman Grissett was well known in the area for their musical abilities.

Most all his daughters and his sons could play music, and they were very good ... They played the piano. At that time, from the time I could remember,

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Jackie Brock, Tim Marlowe, David Robinson, and Frank Lear by Steve Kruger for the North Carolina Folklife Institute April 4, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Jesse Bryant by Steve Kruger for the North Carolina Folklife Institute, March 21, 2013.

he did a lot of singing, and his daughters did a lot of singing. One of his daughters is still living, and she can play piano and sing right on.<sup>12</sup>

When Harry Bryant was a young man he worked on a menhaden fishing crew, an occupational community who had their own repertoire of work songs.

They had what they call chanties. And that way you get in sync. See, it was so hard a work, you had to get in sync with everybody, pulling at the same time, that net . . . see, you had to make them menhaden hard [tightly bound in the net] enough . . . where you could fix it, tighten them up with the mother boat . . . You'd tighten it with your hands, you'd stick your hands in that webbing, and everybody pulled at one time. And when they sung that chanty, if you didn't pull at that time, you didn't raise them . . .

They had different [songs]. You knowed how to get in rhythm with any of them to start it. I was on the boat with some people that could really sing. You know? There was one deacon on the boat, he had some pretty nice ones going. Some of the fellows would have some a little vulgar . . . All different kinds, yes. Some of them were religious songs. This Deacon Bland was on the boat with us, and he could sing. All his were religious-type songs.<sup>13</sup>

Today, a group of African American retired menhaden fishermen from the Southport area—Ernest Wearren, Willie W. Parker, David Floyd, Jr., Charles “Pete” Joyner, and Dan E. Davis, Jr.—perform as the New Southport Chanty Singers, presenting the work songs that they sang decades ago while hauling nets. According to a 2014 article in the Wilmington *Star-News*,

The typical chanty was started by a lead chantyman, who directed the tempo and timing of the work. The crew would follow his rhythm. The lines and verses of the chanty followed the task of the job at hand.

“Two white horses side by side  
One of those horses I’m bound to ride  
Drinking that wine  
Drinking that wine.”

“That was our living,” [Willie] Parker said. “Sing a line, pull the net. Sing a verse, pull it tighter. The songs were sung to the rhythm of work.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Harry Bryant by Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 5, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> D. J. Bernard, “Black History event features chanties from a bygone era.” Wilmington *Star-News*, March 4, 2014.

[www.starnewsonline.com/article/20140304/ARTICLES/140309886](http://www.starnewsonline.com/article/20140304/ARTICLES/140309886), accessed August 20, 2014.

## Archival sources

The seven-volume *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore* contains a variety of song citations from Bladen and Brunswick Counties, collected in the early twentieth century.

Mildred Peterson of Bladen County, a prolific source in the Brown *Collection*, contributed songs from a broad range of categories that nowadays are considered part of the old-time genre. Among these are versions of some of the best-known Southern traditional songs/tunes, including "Liza Jane,"<sup>15</sup> "Down in the Valley" / "Birmingham Jail,"<sup>16</sup> and "Old Dan Tucker."<sup>17</sup> Verses to a song Peterson called "Daisy" are categorized by Brown as being in the family of "Coffee Grows on White Oak Trees," and appears from the text to be a version of a tune strongly associated with the Northwestern North Carolina/Southwestern Virginia area, variously known as "Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss," "Her Blue Eyes Run Me Crazy," and other titles. Peterson contributed a song called "The Old Grey Mare," which Brown cautions is different from the classic tune/song usually known by that title ("The old grey mare, she ain't what she used to be...").

Once I had an old grey mare (repeated 3x)  
Saddled her and rode her there.

When I got there she got tired (3x)  
She laid down in an old courtyard.

Then they begin to sing and pray (3x)  
She jumped up and ran away.

Then I went down the road on her track; (3x)  
Found her in a mud hole flat on her back.<sup>18</sup>

Peterson shared a "Barnyard Song," with a succession of animal noises, and a version of the play-party song "Pig in the Parlor."<sup>19</sup> A version of the song "Some Folks Say that a [expletive] Won't Steal" is closely related to lyrics that the Georgia string band the Skillet Lickers recorded in 1927 as part of "Run [expletive] Run." Mildred Peterson's Bladen County songs are rounded out by three Child ballads, "The Cambric Shirt" (a variant of Child 2, "The Elfin Knight"), "Two Little Boys Going

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<sup>15</sup> FCB Vol. 3, p.522

<sup>16</sup> FCB Vol. 3, p. 330

<sup>17</sup> FCB Vol. 3, p. 115

<sup>18</sup> FCB Vol. 3, 217

<sup>19</sup> FCB Vol. 3, pp. 174, 113

to School" (Child 49, "The Two Brothers"), and "The Lone Widow" (Child 79, "The Wife of Usher's Well").<sup>20</sup>

Louise Lucas of White Oak in Bladen County is cited for three contributions, documented in 1922. They include a version of the widespread Southern song/tune "Old Molly Hare," the song "Ain't Goin' to Worry My Lord No More," and "My Name is Dinah," which Brown's notes suggest has origins in early 1900s glee club singing.<sup>21</sup>

Louise Sloan, also of Bladen County, is credited as the source for a lullaby ("Go to Sleep, Go to Sleep," apparently a version of the widespread "...all the pretty little horses" lullaby),<sup>22</sup> and a verse that Brown classifies as "Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones," "a line found in Negro songs reported from North Carolina and Alabama."

I'm a-living high till I die,  
Bet your life I'm a-living mighty high;  
Oh, sticks and stones for to breaker my bones,  
I know you'll talk about me when I'm gone  
But I'm a-living high till I die.<sup>23</sup>

It should be noted that a nearly identical verse was recorded in the 1920s both by Piedmont North Carolina string band Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, and the Atlanta-area Georgia Crackers, in both cases as the chorus to "Coon From Tennessee;" thus the lyrics may be less related to a true African American song than part of the "coon song" genre of popular white songs written in a racist style.

Three other popular songs from Bladen County appear in the *Brown Collection*. Miss L. M. Cromartie of Ivanhoe sang "Old Bob Ridley," identified here as a work (cornshucking) song but actually a minstrel song by W. L. Hargrave, published in Baltimore in 1853.<sup>24</sup> Miss E. F. Jones is the source for a 1921 rendition of "Old Uncle Ned."<sup>25</sup> Although lyrics are not included, this is presumably a version of the Stephen Foster song of the same name. Mrs. N. J. Herring sang "Silly Bill" on an unknown date in the Tomahawk community.<sup>26</sup> Another well-known popular song of the early twentieth century, "Silly Bill" was recorded as "Charming Bill" by Sam and Kirk McGee (with Uncle Dave Macon and Mazy Todd) in 1927. (Mrs. H. G. Herring, also of

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<sup>20</sup> FCB Vol. 2, pp. 14-15, 49, 100

<sup>21</sup> FCB Vol. 3, pp. 212, 606, 375

<sup>22</sup> FCB Vol. 3, p. 151

<sup>23</sup> FCB Vol. 3, p. 71

<sup>24</sup> FCB Vol. 5, p. 131

<sup>25</sup> FCB Vol. 5, p. 281

<sup>26</sup> FCB Vol. 4, p. 252

Tomahawk, is given as a source for a song called "I'll Give You My Love," which Brown identifies as a variant of "Paper of Pins."<sup>27</sup>)

The Brown Collection also includes several Brunswick County songs. One, from frequent contributor J. C. Knox of Leland, is identified as "When I Was Single."<sup>28</sup> William C. Cumming, a collector from Brunswick County, gave a version of "Go Tell Aunt Rhody" ("Aunt Patsy" in Cumming's version), and a fragment of "Oh Susanna."<sup>29</sup> A quoted annotation from Cumming indicates that his version of the humorous song "The Darby Ram" was "a Negro song . . . brought to Kentucky by a cousin of my Grandma's who married a wealthy slave owner in Louisiana."<sup>30</sup> Cumming also gives family context for a song identified as "Way Down Below," and which Brown suggests is an amalgam of "burnt cork" (ie, minstrel show) songs. (It is unclear whether the "Uncle Billy" mentioned by Cumming was a member of his own white family, or an older African American.)

As we children grew older we used to delight in going out into the country to see Grandma and Uncle Billy, and on summer nights as we sat out on the porch or in the yard we would always try to get him to sing to us. Of course some of his songs, like "Dem Golden Slippers," were not really folklore, but others . . . could be nothing else."

Cumming also writes, of a song that Brown classifies as a version of "Jacob's Ladder,"

Another of Uncle Billie's songs, but one we didn't like nearly as well...

John on the island, don't you grieve after me.  
John on the island, don't you grieve after me.  
John on the island, don't you grieve after me.  
For I don't want you to grieve after me.

Long neck bottle, don't you grieve after me, etc.

When I get married, don't you grieve after me, etc.<sup>31</sup>

The repetitive form of this song suggests possible origins as a work song—perhaps even a net-pulling song, like those remembered today by retired menhaden fishermen in Brunswick County.

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<sup>27</sup> FCB Vol. 5, p. 430

<sup>28</sup> FCB Vol. 3, p. 40

<sup>29</sup> FCB Vol. 1, p. 204, Vol. 3, p. 490

<sup>30</sup> FCB Vol. 2, p. 440

<sup>31</sup> FCB Vol. 3, p. 586

## Craft

One of North Carolina's strongest living, community-based quilt traditions is that of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe. For generations, Waccamaw Siouan women, and perhaps men as well, have quilted for their families and community. Some have also supplemented their livelihood by quilting tops for people outside the tribe. As in many communities, the function of quilting has changed over the course of the last century, from a mainly utilitarian craft that also afforded opportunities for aesthetic creativity, to a mainly artistic pursuit that happens to produce an object that is useful as well as beautiful. The tribe have a strong tradition as well of quilting clubs and teaching, a legacy of such admired community members as Missouri Young Jacobs (1921 – 1990) and Elizabeth "Miss Lee" Graham Jacobs (1909 – 2000).

In the mid-1990s members of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe and folklorist Jill Hemming conducted an extensive survey of quilts in the community, and documented the experiences of living quilters. Of the tradition's importance within tribal culture, Hemming wrote,

Throughout the story of the Waccamaw Siouan tribe's journey, quilting has been a constant thread of female contribution and care. Undermining the stereotypical expectations of what Indian craft should be, the quilts of Waccamaw women are of great value because of their persistence and importance within family and community and for their representation of a rich material history built from the intersections of culture. They are wonderful in their craftsmanship and the role they play in building and maintaining community relationships.<sup>32</sup>

More than 80 Waccamaw Siouan quilts were documented during the project, and from the information gathered, Hemming was able to analyze the way that quilt patterns had changed over the decades. Like those of many traditional communities, the earliest known Waccamaw quilts are of simple design, made up of plain stripes or blocks, or in the form now called "crazy quilts," in which the size and shape of the available scraps determines the appearance of the top. Surprising color combinations, rather than carefully coordinated tones, were popular. Tribal member Marie Simmons, the daughter of well-known Waccamaw quilter Missouri Young Jacobs, explained, "...don't put all the colors together. You kind of mismatch your quilts so they'd be more popular and catch the eye."<sup>33</sup> As the years passed, and particularly as quilting underwent a revival in the tribe in the 1970s, popular designs such as log cabin and monkey wrench appeared. In more recent years some quilters have opted to use tops printed with patchwork-style blocks, or in other ways to highlight printed designs over pieced patterns.

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<sup>32</sup> Jill Hemming, *Waccamaw Siouan Quilters: Piecing the Past and Future*, p. 8

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12

Elizabeth Graham Jacobs, known to friends as Miss Lee, received the North Carolina Heritage Award in 1996 in recognition of her lifetime of quilt-making, and her role in carrying on and teaching the tradition within the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe. Born in 1909, Jacobs knew that there were quilters in her family at least as far back as one of her great-grandmothers, and she said once, "I reckon it was born in me to love to quilt."<sup>34</sup> Her designs were wonderfully various, ranging from very traditional nine-patch, star, and string quilts to striking abstract geometric designs. Jacobs apparently believed that individual creativity was an essential part of traditional quilting.

I like them old-time quilts . . . I reckon because I learned how to do quilts old-timey. Old-time was what you knowed yourself. You didn't have no paper and book kind of stuff. You accumulated this with your own mind. It ain't somebody else accumulated it and give it to you.<sup>35</sup>

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Jacobs reported that she had made approximately 200 quilts in her lifetime. Many of them were documented, with photographs archived at the North Carolina Folklife Institute and in the Jill Hemming Collection of the Southern Folklife Collection at UNC.

Waccamaw Siouan quilters today carry on the legacy that was passed down to them by women of Miss Lee Jacobs' and Missouri Jacobs' generations. Among the active artists is Shirley Freeman. In a 2013 interview she described how she was influenced by several quilting women in her family in community.

Going back to when I was a little girl, my aunt, Aunt Virgie, would quilt on the old pedal sewing machine . . . I was probably about 10. I don't even know if I was that old. But it caught my attention. And Aunt Virgie would get on this old pedal sewing machine, and when she'd get [a top] about halfway quilted she couldn't handle it, so she would put my cousin and I behind the machine to hold the quilt while she pedaled. Well, if we wanted to play we would put our hands on the pedal and try to make it go faster—do all these things kids does—to get the quilt out the way where we could play.

Well, I didn't think about it too much after that until I got married. When I got married . . . my husband's mother said to me one day, "You need to get some of these scraps I've got and make you a quilt top. Well, I didn't know how to make a quilt top, but she said, "I'll show you." I had never seen an electric sewing machine. Never had. And she put me down to the sewing machine to sew my . . . squares together after I got them cut out. And I set down there and sewed that sewing machine, and sewed my thumb. My thumb. The needle went through my thumb. Well, that was it for the sewing.

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<sup>34</sup> *North Carolina Folklore Journal* Vol. 44, Nos. 1-2, 1997, p. 125.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

... that was my first experience with really trying to make a quilt ... But after that, the ladies started quilting at the Fire Department. And I told Aunt Lee [Jacobs] one day ... "I want to learn to do that, but I want my stitches to look like yours." And she gave me a little round hook and showed me how to put three layers together—the top, the lining, and the binding on the back ... I never stopped 'til I mastered doing that. Now, I counted one time that I have made about 90 quilts since I started quilting back in '63. '63's when I got married, and had the needle to go through my finger ... And I love it. That's another thing, I can sit there at night and quilt, and forget to go to bed.<sup>36</sup>

Whiteville resident Ruth King is the daughter of an avid quilter, but her own craft pursuits have focused on other kinds of handwork, particularly crocheting. In King's family there is a long heritage of fiber arts associated with the women in her parents' generation.

I first learned to crochet when I was 10 years old. My dad's sister was the one that first taught me, and she taught me how to do a granny square. She taught me the basic stitches and then taught me how to put it together to make a granny square. And when she saw that I was interested in it, that I was picking up on it good and that she thought that I would do well with it and continue with it, she went out, before the next time she saw me, she went out to the store and bought a little book that Coates and Clark's puts out, the learn-how book. It has the basic stitches of crochet, knitting, crewel, embroidery, and tatting in it. And they still publish it today. And the next time she saw me ... she handed me the book and she said, "Here, now take this and sit down with it and learn how to read the directions." So I taught myself how to read the directions at 10 years old.

In talking about her handwork, King emphasizes the importance of published directions and patterns in traditions like crocheting. While such printed materials have always been an important part of her craft, King still learned within a family tradition, with aunts on both sides of her family mentoring her as she learned.

Lake Waccamaw's Jean Williamson makes quilts, sews, and paints. Her mother and grandmother, from northeastern North Carolina, both sewed—her mother as a professional seamstress, and her grandmother as an at-home seamstress and quilter. Williamson herself enjoyed making clothes for her children's dolls, and when her children were grown, she took a class and learned how to make quilts. She has since also learned quilt preservation techniques, receiving training from the Smithsonian. In addition to quilts, Williamson makes burial gowns for stillborn and miscarried babies, which are given to a hospital in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Shirley Freeman and Nadine Patrick, interviewed Steve Kruger and Chris Fowler for the North Carolina Folklife Institute, January 24, 2013.



It is not uncommon for an avid craftsperson to practice more than one art form. This is exemplified by the work of two Bladen County residents, Clarkton's Judy Elkins and Patricia Smith of White Oak. Elkins demonstrates historic doll-making techniques at Harmony Hall in White Oak, and also knows how to make baskets. Smith, though most actively a gourd artist, is also makes baskets, most often weaving them from honeysuckle vines.

Quilter Shirley Freeman is also known in her community as a skilled basket maker. She says that she knows of no surviving basketry tradition in the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe, but that she was inspired to try her hand at basket weaving in the early 2000s, after a trip to Arizona. A small Navajo basket that she received as a gift captured her imagination.

... when they gave me this [Navajo basket], I said, "Now, I'm going to make that." Now, it took me five years of daydreaming, thinking about it, trying it, seeing what would work—I've got *books* ... But actually it come to me how to do it. When I lay down I think a lot and dream a lot ... it kind of come to me what I needed to do to get a basket started. And it won't that hard, but it was hard for me to get it in my mind about what to do ... But that's how I got started with making the baskets. It's just something I felt within me I wanted to do, and I love doing it.<sup>37</sup>

Freeman has since begun to teach other tribal members how to weave baskets.

Thelma Graddick Johnson was born into a family of sweetgrass basket makers in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. Family oral history traces the family's basket makers through generations enslaved in South Carolina and the West Indies. Thelma Johnson carried this Lowcountry Gullah tradition with her when she and her husband Ron moved to Chadbourn about 40 years ago.

The Johnsons work as a team in the cottage industry. Thelma Johnson makes the baskets themselves. Ron gathers the materials she needs—sweetgrass, bulrush, palmetto, and pine needles—and makes the tools, from spoon handles, that she uses in the weaving process. Together they sell the baskets from a roadside stand—an important element of the sweetgrass basket tradition in South Carolina—in Chadbourn.

In recent decades, the craft of knife making has undergone a renaissance in the hands of a community of bladesmiths that stretches across the Carolinas. Representing the tradition in Bladen County is bladesmith Scott McGhee, who crafts knives from his Guinea Hog Forge in Clarkton. McGhee became interested in metalwork as a boy in Franklinton, when his uncle, a farrier, taught him

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

blacksmithing. He dabbled in knife making as a teenager, and continued to work with a coal-fired forge periodically as an adult, but it was not until 2007 that he turned to knife making as a serious pursuit. What began as an activity to encourage his son to read (they read books about knife making together) bloomed into a home business. McGhee built a gas-fired forge in 2009, which he uses to forge blades. He grinds and tempers the steel blades, and makes handles from fine woods or manmade materials like micarta. The styles of knives currently in production at Guinea Hog Forge include hunting, fighting, bowie and kitchen knives, choppers, and swords.

Representing a traditional craft practiced on an industrial scale, a longtime family-owned business in Columbus County has been making tools for more than a century, and may well have manufactured some of the tools used by boat builders in neighboring Brunswick County. Council Tools, in business at Lake Waccamaw since 1886, began life as a manufacturer of tools for the turpentine trade. It has made many other products over the years, including hammers, mauls, and axes. Clients have included the British Navy, which for years required that each vessel carry a broad axe, supplied by Council Tool. Today, while still making a variety of tools, they specialize in axes for firefighting.

#### Archival Sources

In the late 1970s, the students of Hallsboro High School in Columbus County spoke with quilters during their documentation of the area's heritage. Geraldine Little, an African American quilt maker from the Rico community, and sisters Mina Brown Pierce and Margaret Brown Wilson, who were white, talked about the community context of quilting in ways very similar to the memories shared by Waccamaw Siouan quilters today. All three learned the art from their mothers and other women in their communities. Pierce and Wilson spoke of the social value of quilting get-togethers for women.

The quiltings [according to Pierce and Wilson] were usually all-day affairs. The hostess would "put in" a quilt and invite neighbors to come help quilt. The hostess served a bountiful meal, while the quilters caught up on all the "news" as she guided the needle through the three layers (quilt top, cotton batting, and the lining) that constituted a quilt.<sup>38</sup>

All three women vividly remembered the processes they used to ready cotton for use in batting (a quilt's middle layer). Geraldine Little remembered,

My daddy used to grow cotton. He took it to the gin to get the seed out. Then we would beat it up like beating peas with a tobacco stick. We would beat it up until it was fine and soft. We would spread it out on the quilt lining.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Kinlin' Vol. II, No. 1, Fall and Winter 1977 - 1978, p. 17.

<sup>39</sup> Kinlin' Vol. II, No. 4, 1979 - 1980, pp. 35 - 36.

Mina Pierce told the students that, They saved scraps from their sewing and in those days practically all clothing was made at home. They never threw away anything and used the odd pieces of cloth to make quilt tops. For linings they would use homespun, figured calico, percale, poplin, flannel—all materials made of cotton. They may have bought the piece goods, but they grew cotton and made the bats. "In the fall,"

Mrs. Mina said, "we'd pick the cotton from the bolls in the field. Then we'd seed it by hand, card it by hand, and shape it into bats. The cards had fine teeth on them, and the cotton would be threaded through until it was right and rubbed off into the bats. Our winter job was quilting. The carding and other things could be done at night."<sup>40</sup>

As favorite patterns, the Brown sisters cited Circular Saw, Star of the East, and Flower Garden. In the article about Mrs. Little, no blocks are mentioned by name, but the accompanying photos show a single square, made by her mother, in a Flower Basket pattern, and a whole quilt, presumably made by Little, that appears to be in a variation of the Aunt Dinah pattern. Little, Pierce, and Wilson all talked about quilting in a fan design, which also emerged in Jill Hemmings' research as a favorite quilting method of Waccamaw Siouan quilters in earlier generations.

Volume 2, Number 4 of *Kin'Lin'* features an article about Helen Shaw Jones, an African American craftswoman from the Rico community. Jones gave a detailed account of how she learned to quilt as a girl.

We learned how to quilt from my mother and the other ladies in the community. After making the top and the lining, you use cotton for a filling. Then the quilt is placed on a frame. The quilting is done in a fan design. The shape is about like that fan we used to use in hot weather. We begin at the corner and move all around the quilt. When one row is done all around the quilt, you roll that part so that the quilters can reach to quilt another row of fans. Keep on until the entire quilt has been quilted.

The purpose of quilting was to tack the covering together and to keep the cotton filling in place.

My daddy used to grow cotton. He took it to the gin to get the seed out. Then we would beat it up like beating peas with a tobacco stick. We would beat it until it was fine and soft. We would spread it out on the quilt lining.<sup>41</sup>

*Kin'Lin'* researchers also transcribed Jones' instructions how to make brooms, which she reported was an after-school job during her childhood.

<sup>40</sup> *Kinlin'* Vol. II, No. 1, Fall and Winter 1977 – 1978, p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Kin'Lin'* Personality: Mrs. Helen Shaw Jones, by Linda Sasser. *Kin'Lin'* Vol. II, No. 4 (1979 - '980), pp. 35 – 36.

First gather the straw. The plant is called "broom sedge." It is best to wait until one or two frosts have fallen on the straw. To cut it, I used something called a cradle. It's made curved and round with a handle on one end of it. The other end is very sharp with little teeth in it. Now that you have your straw, you will need some string, and a knife and fork.

Take a handful of straw the size that you want your broom to be. Holding it tightly in hand, use the fork to stroke the straw to get the blossoms out and any loose trash. Next tie the straw with a very strong kind of string. If the broom is very large, weave the string among little bunches with a slip knot. Wrap your string around and around, going toward the top. At the top loop the string, fastening it securely.

Finally, trip the broom at the bottom with the knife. Cut it at an angle. Your broom is now completed.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

## Oral traditions

Southeastern North Carolina is the home of two of North Carolina's most famous mysterious stories. The Maco Light was an apparition, believed by many to be supernatural, that was regularly seen near Maco in Brunswick County throughout most of the twentieth century. Like many mysterious lights it was associated with a legend of a train wreck and the engineer's ghost in search of his lost head. Generations of people in the region made the trek to Maco, on Highway 17 west of Wilmington, to wait for the light. Folklorist Sally Council, a Fuquay-Varina native, saw the light herself, and folklorist Sarah Bryan remembers that during her childhood in nearby Myrtle Beach it was common practice for teenagers to go to Maco in hopes of seeing the light. The light has evidently disappeared in recent years, since the railroad tracks were pulled up.

The other celebrated mystery of the area is that of the Beast of Bladenboro, an unidentified animal believed to have inhabited the swamps of Bladen County in the 1950s. From the end of December 1953 through January 1954, Bladen County, especially the areas around Bladenboro and Clarkton, made national headlines because of a spate of unexplained dog killings. As many as nine dogs were found dead in the area, badly mutilated and seemingly drained of their blood. At the same time, reports surfaced of a large black cat-like animal prowling in and around Bladen County's swamps. A multi-day hunt was mounted, drawing thousands of hunters and spectators to Bladenboro, but the animal was never caught or definitively identified.

The *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore* makes reference to another fearsome animal in Bladen County. 1921, Louise Sloan of Davidson in Mecklenburg County, reported:

In Bladen county some people still believe what a great many people used to tell about the "vociferous gallinippers," a kind of powerful mosquito that went on the rampage after sundown and in one well-known case carried off a [black] baby. To escape them you should stay in the house with the windows and doors shut or burn light'ood knots or smudges, and if you go abroad at night carry a torch.<sup>43</sup>

Two Bladen County women contributed a large number of riddles to folklorists in the 1920s, which were later published in the *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*. Mildred Peterson was the more prolific informant, though Louise Lucas too was generous with information.

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<sup>43</sup> *Brown Collection*, Volume 1, p. 703

Some of the riddles concern domestic objects. Peterson told two riddles, and Lucas one, for which the answer was “a needle.”

What jumps over the fence and leaves his tail behind him?<sup>44</sup>

What goes all over the world and has but one eye?<sup>45</sup>

There is an old woman that has but one eye. Every time she goes through the gap she leaves a piece of her tail in the gap.<sup>46</sup>

Several of Peterson’s other riddles were about household objects.

What walks with its head downward? (Shoe tack)<sup>47</sup>

Opens like a barn door,  
Shuts up like a trap,  
Guess all your life,  
You’ll never guess that. (Scissors)<sup>48</sup>

Crooked as a rainbow,  
Teeth like a cat.  
Guess your lifetime,  
You’ll never guess that. (Saw)<sup>49</sup>

I have a grandmother who walked all day and when she got home took up no more space than could be covered by a penny. (Cane)<sup>50</sup>

Long tall, black fellow,  
Pull him back and hear him bellow. (Gun.)<sup>51</sup>

Long, slick, black fellow,  
Pull his tail, and hear him holler. (Shotgun)<sup>52</sup>

In the same category, Louise Lucas contributed the following.

Round as an apple,

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 290

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 294

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 290

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 302

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 300

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 296

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

Busy as a bee.  
The prettiest thing  
That you ever did see. (Watch)<sup>53</sup>

Others of Peterson's riddles were miscellaneous.

I am a small house and my name is yellow. (Egg)<sup>54</sup>

What is that of which the outside is silver and the inside is of gold? (Egg)<sup>55</sup>

What is that which is brought by a man, is full of nuts, has no tongue, and yet speaks like a man? (Letter)<sup>56</sup>

Crooked as a rainbow,  
Slick as a plate.  
Ten thousand horses  
Can't pull it up. (River)<sup>57</sup>

Dead in the middle and live at both ends. (Man and horse plowing)<sup>58</sup>

A dog in the woods can't bark. (Dogwood tree)<sup>59</sup>

Mildred Peterson seems to have had a fondness for funny riddles. The second shotgun riddle, and the verse about a river, above, both have the built-in humor of incomplete rhymes (fellow/holler rather than fellow/bellow, and plate/up rather than plate/straight). Two other riddles from Peterson, and one from Lucas (the third below), might as easily have been categorized as jokes.

What kind of husband would you advise a young lady to get? (A single man)<sup>60</sup>

What is the difference between a lover and an old maid? (One kisses the misses; the other misses the kisses.)<sup>61</sup>

Why does the chimney smoke? (Because it can't chew.)<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 300

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 298

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 304

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 296

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 300

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 78

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 292

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 317

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 318

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 320

Finally, the *Collection* includes two jokes contributed by Peterson, and classified by Brown as puns.

Is it a sin to feed chickens on Sunday? (I feed mine on corn.)

Did you know that they were not going to make matches any longer? (Long enough.)<sup>63</sup>

The research conducted by the North Carolina Folklife Institute did not focus on gathering folktales, riddles, or similar traditional lore. It became clear, however, over the course of the interviews, that the three-county region is home to a great many informal storytellers—talented speakers who enjoy sharing the lore of their home region.

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 322



## Occupational heritage

Throughout the history of Southeastern North Carolina, many men and women have made their livings in one (or more) of three principal industries: maritime work (including fishing), forest products (including turpentine and tar), and farming. Historically the three industries are closely interrelated. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, boat builders relied on products created in the naval stores industry—forest-derived products like wood and tar. In more recent generations, members of a family might tend their farm through the growing season, for example, and then out of season work in a fish house, fish themselves, or work in the woods.

All three industries have diminished significantly over the past several decades. A rich occupational heritage lives on in the knowledge and practices of many tradition bearers in the region. The North Carolina Folklife Institute's research focused on occupational traditions, especially those of the fishing industry—which, while challenged, lives on in coastal Brunswick County.

Nicky Varnam has shrimped most of his life. Like many people interviewed during this project, he lamented the decline in Brunswick County's fishing industry.

Back in the '50s and '60s, all this was shrimp area. Then banks started loaning money, and guys started building boats. At one time there was seven boatyards here, now there ain't n'ar one. Price of boats has gone high, fuel costs right now. The young generation not getting into it no more. Slowly playing out . . . See, the cost of shrimp's the same thing when I got out in 1984.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the depressed local seafood market, Nicky and Jackie Varnam continue to operate their family business, the Garland's Seafood fish house at Varnamtown. The fish house was built by Nicky's grandfather Garland, using building materials that were salvaged after Hurricane Hazel in 1954. Folklorist Steve Kruger writes, "Today, places like Beacon 1, Garland's, and Carson Varnam's Shellfish Market provide a place for local fishermen to sell their catch and dock their boats, and also, for interested travelers to purchase seafood close to the water."<sup>65</sup>

Gordon Winfree, owner of Gordon's Net Works in Shallotte, is among the area's last practitioners of one of the most important traditional skills associated with the fishing industry, net making. While still a boy he had an after-school job at Ed's Net Shop in Grissettown, where he learned the trade.

When I went [to Ed's Net Shop], they were slammed. It was summertime, that's when they're slammed . . . I was kind of throwed into the fire, you know

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Jackie and Nicky Varnam by Steve Kruger for NCFI, February 14, 2013

<sup>65</sup> Steve Kruger, notes to interview with Jackie and Nicky Varnam

what I mean? And back then . . . the nets were bigger. They made 70-, 80-, 100-footers. That was before everybody went to four-barrel rigs, where they pull four barrels off the shrimp boats . . . And so if you sewed that seam up wrong, you'd spend another day cutting it back out, trying to sew it up right.<sup>66</sup>

Winfree says that today most of his business comes from commercial shrimpers, or from gill netters, as well as recreational fishermen who buy his hand-made cast nets. He also does a steady business in net repair, hanging the nets outside to fix the webbing.

Retired fisherman Harry Bryant of Cedar Grove in Brunswick County remembers they days when his father was part of a mullet fishing crew.

My dad farmed in the summer. At that time they did something called mullet fishing. In the fall of the year he'd go down and join the crew, and . . . The man that owned the beach [a member of the Holden family] would haul them all over the state and distribute them out and sell them . . .

[They used] a haul seine. They'd see a school of mullets—had what they call a lookout. He would be up the beach, maybe a quarter of a mile. When he see the mullets coming down he would—it was called a wave, he'd wave to the captain down the beach. They'd get all the crew mobilized, up in the boat, then when the right time come they'd go out in the ocean and go around these fish, go around, let them run into the net, then make this circle and bring them back in. Then they'd pull them on shore. Then they'd gather them up, split them, put them in barrels, salt [them].<sup>67</sup>

Harry Bryant himself worked in a now-antiquated facet of the fishing industry, the menhaden (also known as pogies) crew. He described the work to folklorist Steve Kruger, noting that much of the labor was aided by sea chanties sung by the crew.

. . . they had what they call chanties. And that way you get in sync. See, It was so hard a work, you had to get in sync with everybody, pulling at the same time, that net . . . see, you had to make them menhaden hard enough [tightly packed in the drawn net] . . . You'd tighten it with your hands, you'd stick your hands in that webbing, and everybody pulled at one time. And when they sung the chanty, if you didn't pull at that time you didn't raise them, get them tight enough to bale them. See, at one time, they bailed them with a dip net . . . on a hickory pole. And they had a engine back in there, and it would pick the whole bale net up, before they got the pumps on the boat . . .

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Gordon Winfree by Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 5, 2013

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Harry Bryant by Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 5, 2013

[The mate] handled the end of the pole to push it down . . . and the engineer, he was in there running a little engine called a Leroy . . . He picked it up, the mate swung it out, stuck it down in there. Whenever he got it all the way down in the fish, he'd pick it up and have a sack full of fish this deep in there. And then he swung it over, and one man on the bottom had a trip line, and he had to hold that line hard enough to hold the rings together, to hold that net together. Once it got over the [mother] ship hold, he let it go and it all jumped in the hold . . . [To imagine what it was like] multiply hard work by two.<sup>68</sup>

Boatbuilding is a tradition that goes hand-in-hand with the fishing industry in Brunswick County. Danny Galloway of Varnamtown, a prominent member of the community of former and current fishermen in Brunswick County, describes how his career as a waterman quickly led him to boatbuilding as well.

My dad, he never did hold a job, he just always worked in the river. He didn't never own a shrimp boat, not of the class boats that we have, but he was just always a waterman. And I grew up in the river. And [when] I got out of high school, I went to work with a brother of mine for 10 years, and then me and my first cousin, we built the first boat. But I've always shrimped, and when I got out of school I shrimped two years. And I liked it.

But then I didn't have no opportunity to get a boat. I had to kind of work my way in it. We built the boat on Saturdays and weekends, and we picked up all the scrap we could find to build it—named it *Scraps*. And I kept it for like 15 years, and then I bought this 80-footer.<sup>69</sup>

Like many watermen who grew up in the area, Galloway absorbed traditional knowledge of boat building throughout his youth.

Well, it's one of them things, kind of like shrimping. You grow up in it, in your mind you got a basic picture of what a shrimp boat should look like. And then you've got to have the skills to take that, or take a log, or take boards, and fabricate it to where it'll look like that. And all the boats I've knowed of has ever been built, we didn't never have no plans. You know, if somebody come to you and say, "I want a 60-foot boat," well, you'd know the length of it. Well, a 60-foot boat, you could just say a third of that would be 20 foot, so that would probably be—the way shrimp boats is designed, that would probably be the width of it. And then how much water it drewed up under the boat, where you wanted something shallow, the deeper you made it the better sea boat you had. But you had to make it deep enough to accommodate the power that you's going to put in it. So if you wanted to turn a five-foot wheel prop, if you wanted that much power, you had to build that keel, you had to

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Harry Bryant by Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 5, 2013

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Danny Galloway by Steve Kruger for NCFI, February 26, 2013

stack that keel deep enough to get that much room between the bottom of the keel and the bottom of the boat . . . And then the building part of it, you just had to have enough general knowledge of carpentry. And probably you'd have to be around boat building for a while. I don't know if nobody could just jump out and build a shrimp boat that had never been around a boat. But if you've been around one, you worked on them, you've been around people that had built them, you know, you just pick up different things.<sup>70</sup>

In later years Danny Galloway fished with a boat built by his neighbor, Weston Varnam. Varnam, now in his nineties, has a reputation in the region not only as an expert builder of full-size boats, but also as a skilled maker of model boats. Galloway reports that Varnam has built hundreds of models over the years. Other members of the Varnam family, including Clyde, Billy, and Ed Varnam, have been boat builders as well. Another highly respected boat builder, who passed away in 2013, was August Kreger, an Estonian immigrant who settled in Brunswick County.

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Danny Galloway by Steve Kruger for NCFI, February 26, 2013

## Traditional Medicine

*Please note that the remedies included here are presented for documentary purposes only. NCFI makes no claims regarding their safety or efficacy.*

In the course of this project, researcher Anna McLean Scott spoke with Mexican immigrants to southeastern North Carolina who shared with her traditional home remedies. The interviewees, primarily from the state of Guerrero, spoke of the following home and herbal remedies.

*Té de flor de arnica y manzanilla: Tomar para dolor de estómago*  
(Arnica flower and chamomile tea: Take for stomachache)

*Arnica: para limpiar el sitio de cirugía (tambien toma el té de arnica)*  
Arnica: for cleaning surgery incision site (also drink arnica tea)

*Sabila: Hace "Té Ayudasamar," o usa para limpiar la piel*  
Aloe: Make "Ayudasamar" ("Help to get better") Tea, or use to clean skin

*Para dolor de cabeza: Frote rodajas de limon en la cabeza, envuelve para mantener el limon, masaje, y lo más importante . . . ora!*  
For headache: Rub lemon slices on the head, wrap to hold the lemon, massage, and, most important . . . pray!

*Para las contusiones: Compresa caliente de manzana*  
For bruises: Hot apple compress

*Para el azúcar: Bebida de sabila, nopal, y tomatillo; pone todo en licuadora.*  
For the sugar [diabetes]: Drink of aloe, nopal, and tomatillo; put it all in a blender.

*Para el azúcar: Avena y piña/jugo de piña; tomar en ayunas para la azúcar grave.*  
For the sugar [diabetes]: Oat and pineapple/pineapple juice; take on an empty stomach for serious diabetes.

Interviewees also recommended a drink of soaked and blended canary grass seed for diabetes; oregano for cough; lime and honey for cold; and application of potato slices for headache and stomachache.<sup>71</sup>

## Archival sources

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<sup>71</sup> Fieldnotes, Anna McLean Scott;

In the *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, numerous remedies and health- and wellbeing-related superstitions were contributed by a Carl Knox of Leland, in Brunswick County. This would appear to be Carl Goodman Knox, b. 1902, a white graduate of Duke University (then Trinity), and farmer, teacher, and sometime social worker in Brunswick County. The era and circumstances in which Knox collected the information is not explained.

To hasten the birth of a child, give a woman gunpowder and make her eat it. However, it should be borne in mind that this increases the pain.<sup>72</sup>

Borrow a drawing knife, place it under the bed of a woman in confinement, and the pains during and after birth will be greatly decreased.<sup>73</sup>

[Note: As demonstrated by the long list of comparative citations that Brown includes with this remedy, this is a common folk belief. Folklorist Sarah Bryan heard this as a child in the late 1970s in neighboring Horry County, South Carolina, from Halistine Gore Sarvis, an African American woman born in Horry County in the mid-1930s. Sarvis specified that it must be a sharp knife, and that placement under the bed would cut the pain of childbirth in half.]

A cold wind blowing through an open door is said to be a stepmother's breath.<sup>74</sup>

Let a lousy-headed child go out in the first May rain, and he will be rid of the lice.<sup>75</sup>

If one, after he has pulled a tooth, does not put his tongue in the place from whence the tooth came, a gold tooth will come in that vacant place.<sup>76</sup>

One who eats a deer's gall will have the speed and wind of a deer.<sup>77</sup>

One who has been bitten by a snake has a snake hanging to his liver. As soon as the snake has eaten the liver up, the person will die.<sup>78</sup>

For a cold, tie a wet cotton string around the neck, and let it stay overnight.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> FCB Vol. 6, p. 8

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, 62

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107

Apply a plaster of sweet gum to [a] corn. A few applications will finally cure it.<sup>80</sup>

Eel oil poured into the ear is good for deafness.<sup>81</sup>

Bore a hole in a nutmeg and string it around your neck, and this will strengthen the eyes.<sup>82</sup>

To relieve the headache, press the head hard with the hands, both in front and behind, and on the sides.<sup>83</sup>

Burnt alum, put on a sore that has proud flesh [usually refers to a skin tag] in it, will remove or kill out the proud flesh.<sup>84</sup>

For lockjaw, give a tablespoonful of strong pepper vinegar.<sup>85</sup>

To remove a crick in the neck, get down on your hands and knees and rub where hogs have been rubbing.<sup>86</sup>

Bore a hole through a ("he") nutmeg and string it around your neck, and this will cure neuralgia.<sup>87</sup>

For toothache, make a poultice of corn meal, ashes, and salt (about equal parts of corn meal and ashes, and about half or one-third as much salt), mix with water, and apply hot to the side of the face.<sup>88</sup>

For toothache, put a teaspoonful of salt on the tooth, close the mouth and hold it until relieved.<sup>89</sup>

Pick a wart until it bleeds, get some of the blood from it on a grain of corn, throw the kernel over the right shoulder to a chicken, and if the chicken eats it, the wart will disappear.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p. 161

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p. 169

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 181

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 205

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 225

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 231

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, p. 237

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p. 238

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p. 303

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 305

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, p. 325

Pick a wart and get some of the blood from it on a handkerchief; then throw the handkerchief away, and the person who finds it will get the warts.<sup>91</sup>

Warts may be cured by cutting as many notches in a cedar limb as you have warts, and then throwing the limb over your head at a crossroads and walking away without looking back.<sup>92</sup>

An unnamed informant from Brunswick County, possibly Knox again, also supplied the following remedy:

If soot is put in a fresh cut, the flow of blood will cease, and the place will heal without soreness.<sup>93</sup>

Nearly as prolific a source of remedies and health-related beliefs in the *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore* was a Mildred Peterson of Bladen County.

Never cut your hair at night. It will make you forgetful.<sup>94</sup>

Rub raw meat on the warts and throw it away. Then you will have no warts.<sup>95</sup>

To cure a wart, wear (twist) a hair around it.<sup>96</sup>

A fin-bone of the haddock, taken from the living fish without the knowledge of other persons, and worn in a bag, will cure toothache.<sup>97</sup>

To cure a bee sting, put tobacco grease on it.<sup>98</sup>

Horse-radish/buzzard grease/goat grease will cure rheumatism.<sup>99</sup>

To prevent and cure rheumatism carry a horse chestnut in your pocket.<sup>100</sup>

Never let a chicken die in your hand, or you'll have the palsy.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, p. 334

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, p. 340

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, p. 125

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p. 317

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, p. 312

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, p. 303

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p. 291

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 260, 256, 255

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, 259



If one eats the inside lining of a chicken gizzard, which has been dried and powdered, he will be cured of indigestion.<sup>102</sup>

To cure sore eyes, wear earrings.<sup>103</sup>

A fin-bone of the haddock will cure cramp.<sup>104</sup>

For cramps, wear a bone from the head of a cod.<sup>105</sup>

Though the connection to Bladen County is not clear, Mildred Peterson is cited as a source of information about “a conjuration cure for rheumatic swelling,” credited to “Sara McLean, an old Scotch woman” in Montgomery County. “The afflicted person must come when the moon is new. She [McLean?] looks at the moon and says, ‘What I see I know will increase, what I feel I hope will decrease.’ This is not to be told to anybody. Other words followed in Scotch.”<sup>106</sup>

Louise Lucas of White Oak in Bladen County reported as a mumps cure to “rub the swollen parts against a bone of some animal.”<sup>107</sup> Louise W. Lucas, who seems to have had ties to both Bladen and Davidson Counties, reported that “It is a Bladen county belief that typhoid fever always follows the clearing of land. Don’t live there for a year or two.” Lucas also mentioned a madstone in Charlotte “guaranteed by the owner to cure anyone affected with hydrophobia.”<sup>108</sup> Unnamed Bladen County sources recommended that milkweed juice, when applied for several days, would cure a wart, and that red flannel tied around an inflamed area would cure it of rheumatic symptoms.<sup>109</sup>

Frank C. Brown cited no Columbus County remedies in his anthology of North Carolina folkways. That scarcity, however, was more than compensated for by the collecting efforts of Hallsboro High School students in the 1970s and ‘80s, working for their school folklife publication *Kinlin*.

African American midwife and community nurse Debbie Dew of Bolton, speaking with a *Kinlin* interviewer in 1978 or ‘79, recalled some of the remedies she used in the Bolton-Riegelwood area in the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p. 247

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p. 220

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, p. 183

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, p. 164

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 163

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, p. 268

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p. 235

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, 219, 308

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 327, 268

For medicines, I had fresh turpentine, liniments, and stuff like that. I gave it to them if their stomach hurt . . . We used sassafras tea to help break out the measles. If someone had the measles, we would dig the sassafras root up, wash them off real good, boil them, and strain them. Add sugar for sweetness. We would use the tea leftover and give it like medicine.

Catnip tea was given to babies to make them rest. It was also given when they had the hives. Nutmeg tea was used to give people for upset stomachs. We just boiled it. From the wormwood bush, we used to take the herb and brew it in a tea, which we gave to the children for the worms. We had spirits of nitre in little bottles that we gave people for fever and kidney trouble.<sup>110</sup>

In 1975, a *Kinlin'* article by Hallsboro High School student Marjorie Jacobs featured remedies collected from an unnamed African American interviewee in the Union Baptist Community of Hallsboro.

[Cough medicine]

1. Ten pine top needles
2. Dash of sea sage (grows wild in woods)
3. Rabbit tobacco (grows wild in woods)

Combine and boil together all ingredients and sweeten with honey . . .

[To "loosen" a "chest cold"]

1. 1 tbs. roasted garlic on hearth
2. 2 tbs. tallow fat (fry fat of beef and use oil)

Eat the roasted garlic. Grease the bottom of the feet with the tallow. Sit in front of the fire and let feet bake.

For the temperature [fever?]:

1. 1 1/2 cup worm wood (grows in gardens)
2. 1 cup poke root (grows wild in fields)

Make a tea of the worm wood and drink. Beat up poke root to make a poultice and tie around feet.

Sore throat:

1. Gargle with vinegar.
2. Blow powdered alum and baking soda down throat.
3. Rub with spirits of turpentine.
4. Tie collards around neck.

If none of these remedies help you, a sure cure is 1 1/2 bottle of warm castor oil with camphor in it.

Measles

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<sup>110</sup> "Midwifery," *Kinlin'*, Vol. II, No. 3, 1978 – 1979, p. 50

1. Get in a bed in a very dark room.
2. Drink plenty of sassafras tea and fodder tea. (Fodder is dry corn blades).
3. The fodder tea will make you break out. In three days the bumps will dry in.

#### Chicken Pox

1. Drink fodder and sassafras tea to make you break out.
2. Sit in front of the chicken house and let the chickens fly out over your head.

#### Mumps

1. Eat one can of sardines each day for a week. Rub under throat with sardine oil

#### First Aid

##### Sprains or slight breaks

1. Mix 1 lb. clay with about ½ cup vinegar to make a paste.
2. Put this paste on hurt spot. Removes swelling.

##### Snake Bite

1. The only thing to do is to cut the bite, let the poison bleed out and then wrap.
2. Next bury the part that was bitten for 1 hour in a hole.

##### Stomach Ache

1. 1 teaspoon asafetidea gum and 2 teaspoons white whiskey.
2. Drink. (Like an alka-seltzer today.)

Another Columbus County source, Mrs. Carl Moses Fowler, shared her mother's remedies from the New Hope community with interviewer Deborah Long. The extensive list of remedies includes application of spider webs, dry alum, or egg skin to cuts to stop bleeding; taking about a teaspoonful of vinegar, or wearing Spanish moss in one's shoes, to treat high blood pressure; application of vanilla flavoring or condensed milk to burns, and damp table salt to sunburns to prevent blistering; sweet catnip tea for babies' colic; honey, lemon, and bourbon cough syrup; application of sweet oil or onion juice to aching ears; treatment of headaches by application of a camphor- or water-dampened brown bag containing salt and pepper; white clay from a well, taken from the tip of a knife, to treat heartburn and hiccups; dog fennel seed tea for kidney trouble; mustard poultice, or tallow poultice on flannel, applied to the chest for pneumonia; for rheumatism, a teaspoon of vinegar, white Karo syrup and hot water, or a bath in vinegar or smartweed; honey and alum or saltwater gargle for sore throat; fat meat to draw a thorn out of the

flesh; and hot water gargle for an abscessed tooth. Mrs. Fowler shared two remedies that agreed with those collected in Hallsboro by Marjorie Jacobs: sassafras tea for measles, and a clay-and-vinegar poultice for sprains. (She also recommended letting a chickens fly over one's head to treat measles—not, as Jacobs' informant suggested, to treat the chicken pox.) Among the more elaborate or unusual of Mrs. Fowler's mother's remedies were the following:

Boils, risings, bone felons, carbuncles, and other sores:

- Take an okra blossom and put on a rising or boil to bring it to a head.
- Make a paste of Octagon soap and sugar and place on the boil. It will bring out the corruption.
- Bathe in ocean salt water to cure bed sores.
- If one has a carbuncle, he should take a collard leaf and fat meat. Apply to the infected area, to draw out the corruption.
- For a bone felon, put a toad front over the finger.

Colds and "flu":

- Wear winter underwear until May to keep from catching cold.
- Keep pine tar in your water bucket. Drinking water from it is good for colds.
- Pine-top tea is good for colds and fevers. Clean gree pine-needles and boil with sugar. Drink about a cupful.
- Mix mustard seed and Vicks salve on a flannel cloth. Place on the chest. This is good for breaking up chest colds.
- To kill germs during a flu epidemic, dust the house with sulphur.

Freckles:

- Go into the garden seven days a week. Each day take the dew collected on a collard leaf and place on freckles. This will cause them to disappear.

Nail puncture:

- If you step on a nail, pull the nail out and drive it into a tree. You will never have lockjaw.<sup>111</sup>

In 1981-1982, Hallsboro student Darryl Wilson shared a remedy for lice from his grandmother, Annie Junious.

She recommends the use of beetle dust, the kidn used for pests on collards. She said to wash hair and sprinkle in the dust. Let it stay two days. Then

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<sup>111</sup> Deborah Long, "Home Remedies," *Kinlin'* Vol. I, No. 5, Fall/Winter 1976 – 1977.

rewash hair and repeat the treatment. Wash again and the lice should be gone for sure.<sup>112</sup>

In 1973, Southeastern Community College and the North Carolina Committee for Continuing Education in the Humanities, in cooperation with the Columbus County Historical Society, published the results of a series of interviews with elderly Columbus County residents. The interviews, which focused on quality of life in the county between 1900 and 1920, included much discussion of medicine and home remedies. According to the authors, "The nearest hospital mentioned was in Wilmington . . . and was very rarely used. All subjects agreed that a trip to the hospital was almost unheard of. 'People just died,' one said."<sup>113</sup>

...all thirteen of the people interviewed said home remedies were numerous. Many of these home remedies incorporated manufactured drugs such as quinine, sulphur, calomel, and morphine. All of the subjects mentioned herb teas including sassafras, rabbit tobacco, catnip, bitterwort, sage, and rhubarb. Teas were used mainly for reducing fevers. Other home remedies included poultices made from red oak bark and meal for ground itch [hookworms or pinworms]. Poultice of raccoon grease and kerosene were used for respiratory problems. Cough syrup was made from honey. Cuts were treated with turpentine (a widely used item) and with kerosene. One person said that fever in children was treated by wrapping the child in a sheet filled with peach tree leaves.<sup>114</sup>

Thomas E. Applewhite, a 91-year-old white resident of Delco, reported that calomel, rhubarb, castor oil, quinine, spirits of turpentine, laudanum, morphine, and bark from red oak (to make poultice for boils) were used to treat ailments in his youth. Weldon Pierce, a 78-year-old white resident of the Redbug Community in Hallsboro, remembered teas from sassafras, rabbit tobacco, sage, and catnip. He said that an "old slave woman" (presumably a former slave) was engaged to treat more serious illnesses, which she did with teas of her own brewing.<sup>115</sup> Joseph Hufham, a white 70-year-old resident of Delco, spoke of Jerusalem oak (which "made salve and jelly and used for worm medicine, for man and beast"), red oak bark tea, and rabbit tobacco tea for fever; he said that nutmeg and sugar were added to the tea. (It is not clear whether Mr. Hufham was born in Columbus County, or if he was an immigrant.)<sup>116</sup> Lizzie Clark, a 91-year-old African American retiree in Chadbourn, discussed the use of sassafras tea sweetened with molasses "to clear the blood"; store-bought "blue butter" for head lice; mullein for swellings; sulphur and molasses for boils; boneset

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<sup>112</sup> Darryl Wilson, "Treating Lice, Working Roots, and Using Hoover Dust," *Kinlin'* Vol. II, No. 1, 1981 - 1982, p. 85.

<sup>113</sup> *Summary of Interviews with Elderly Persons Concerning Quality of Life in Columbus County from 1900 - 1920*, p. 13.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, Weldon Pierce, p. 2

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, Joseph Hufham, p. 2

for fever; catnip tea for babies (colic?); asefoedita (sic) for stomachache; and quinine for unspecified purposes.<sup>117</sup>

James M. Gore, a white retired farmer from Tabor City, then 86 years old, spoke at length about home medicine. The nearest doctor who would make housecalls, he said, was a Dr. Sloan in Little River, South Carolina. Gore remembered the use of deer tallow for colds, and aspirin and raw turpentine for cuts. He said that medicinal catnip, bitterwort, sage, and sassafras were all grown in the home garden. He remembered that,

...when your blood gets bad [not clear whether this refers to high blood pressure or another ailment] if you'll go and break you a bush of aldren [sic] . . . and skin the bark off it and get that next bark and put it in a quart jar and fill it up with water and take you a few drinks of that when you want water..."

Gore also spoke of a time when a local teacher named Woodard "had chills and fever here in the fall of the year, and we went in the branch and dug this [unnamed plant] . . . and put it in the washpot and boiled it down." His mother mixed the resulting product with biscuit dough, and named the concoction Gore and Woodard Pills.<sup>118</sup>

As noted above, NCFI makes no claims as to the safety or efficacy of the remedies and practices documented in this chapter. However, their prevalence, here and in neighboring regions, points to generations of use. Reliance on home remedies is traditionally a product not simply of a lack of access to formal medicine, but also of a culture in which treating and preventing illness was the domain of traditional practitioners as well as homemakers caring for their families.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., Lizzie Clark, p. 2

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, James M. Gore, pp. 2 - 3

## Food

Columbus County historian and educator Mary Mintz, born in 1918, reminisced about the food that her family ate when she was a girl.

We didn't eat much meat while I was growing up. We usually had sausage or bacon or ham for breakfast, and vegetables the rest of the day. Mother always had a wonderful vegetable garden, and we canned a lot of stuff. Didn't have freezer back then. I would help her do that. When we were growing up Mother let me work in the kitchen, and my sister did the housecleaning.

My family liked to have cornbread and biscuits at every meal, and whatever else was in the garden, like collard greens and stuff, in the wintertime. We had potato banks . . . that's the way they save the potatoes in the wintertime, put them in a pile and then bank pine straw all around them, and then dirt on top. It would keep out the cold enough to save them 'til the next year, or all winter.

We had cows, because you couldn't go to the store and buy milk, so we had a lot of butter, and I learned how to make cottage cheese. Every Saturday—it seems like it was every Saturday, I'm sure it wasn't—I made teacakes with butter, and they were very rich. They would last all week, with my four brothers.<sup>119</sup>

Oral history research conducted in 1973 with elderly residents of Columbus County echoed and expanded on Mintz's descriptions of early-twentieth-century Columbus County kitchens.

Methods of preserving foods were limited. Pork was evidently the main meat and it was preserved by salting and sometimes smoking. One subject said beef was hung and dried. Another mentioned pickling beef in a barrel of brine. "Kegged fish," fish salted in brine, were also used. Most vegetables were canned (although one subject said no canning was done in his area until about 1900). Sweet potatoes and Irish [white] potatoes were stored in earthen mounds and covered with pine straw. Vegetable canning was an extremely hot and time consuming work and was done outside, one said. Pears and apples were sliced and placed on blankets to dry in the sun. Field peas were dried, along with some beans and peppers. Wheat and rice were grown at home and stored. Fresh milk was placed in a glass jar and lowered in an open well.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with Steve Kruger and Chris Fowler for NCFI, Jan. 9, 2013.

<sup>120</sup> *Summary of Interviews with Elderly Persons Concerning Quality of Life in Columbus County from 1900 to 1920*, p. 14.

Though the meals Mary Mintz describes, and that the elderly interviewees spoke of in 1973, were eaten roughly a century ago, the memories are much like those of younger residents of Southeastern North Carolina and of traditions still practiced today. In many ways they could have been describing a contemporary kitchen in Columbus, Bladen, or Brunswick County. The food traditions of the region still feature home-grown vegetables, and a reliance on old methods of food preservation. Many interviewees in the course of this research spoke of home-grown and home-produced foods, including garden produce, orchard fruits, pecans, sugarcane, and honey.

The availability of fresh garden produce creates a need for food preservation methods to ensure that fruits and vegetables are on the table year-round. Home cooks in this region have long been adept canners, and continue the practice today. Jesse Bryant, an elder in the African American community of Cedar Grove in Brunswick County, remembers that around the late 1930s,

... we had a canning house where we'd meet twice a week under the auspices of the United States Department of Agriculture, to can fruits for the neighbors. We'd meet twice a week. Everybody's carry whatever they had to can there, and can it and take it home ... Everybody carried their fruits, then everybody dressed it and they cooked it and they canned it ... Whatever was raised on the farm was canned there.<sup>121</sup>

Ruth King of Whiteville cans food frequently. With the pears and other fruits from her home orchard and gardens she makes jams and spreads, watermelon rind pickles, and other preserves, which she sells at a local farmers' market. At the time of her interview for this project, King's mother, then 98 years old, still made liver pudding every year.

Traditional sweeteners feature in regional foodways as well. Jesse Bryant remembers that, while his family didn't make molasses when he was a child, they did grow sugarcane. The family would "just chew it up. It would have a real good sweetness to it."<sup>122</sup> Bryant, who is African American, remembers that there were also some white people in the area who were beekeepers, but he does not remember any black beekeepers.

Luke Elkin keeps bees on his family land in the Western Prong community of Columbus County. He learned as a teenager from an older neighbor whose methods were very different from those Elkins employs today.

Oh Lord, when I was 16 years old—and that was way back yonder!—my neighbor right across the road back there, oh, he must have had 10 hives or

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<sup>121</sup> Jesse Bryant, interview with Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 5, 2013

<sup>122</sup> Jesse Bryant, interview with Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 5, 2013



15 hives. And it was the old log stump, hollow log blocks—be gums, they called them back then. I'd go by his house, and he had a bunch of boys too, and we'd play together. [I] always kind of wondered about them bees . . . One day I asked him about it, and I got to asking him questions. He says—and he was a real old guy—he says, “You interested in bees?” I said, “Well, yeah, kind of.” He said, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do.” He said, “I’m getting ready to take some honey in the next week. If you’ll come up here and help me take honey, I’ll give you a couple of these hives.” “Boy,” I said, “I’ll do that.”

So I went up and helped him after he got the bees—back then you killed the bees. You killed all the bees, and you went in there and broke the hive open. You had no way to control [them]. So . . . what you done, you take a little sulfur and cotton, put a little sulfur on cotton, dig you a little hole in the ground about as big as both fists, and you put that cotton in it. Then you took that hive—and you got [the cotton] smoking—you set that hive right over that sulfur . . . and it killed them . . . And you set them over there and put a little dirt around it, wait just a minute, and then you go back there and take it up, and then you take it on in the house, because every be in there’ll be dead. And that’s the way we did it back then. But then they started getting these modern hives, you know, where you could put the frames in them and you could control them and look in them [without killing the bees].<sup>123</sup>

One of Elkins’ specialties is gallberry honey, a kind that can only be produced near swamps.

I tell you what makes some good honey is gallberry blossoms. Little gallberry blossoms out of the swamp part. It’s a little green bush that has a little, small, little-bitty flower on it. But it smells real good. And the swamps around here and branches, a lot of that’s in there. It makes some real good honey . . . But the problem is, when people say, “I’ve got this kind of honey” or “I’ve got that kind of honey,” it’s not necessarily true, because while that flower’s blooming, this other flower is blooming too, and these bees don’t say, “I’m going out this morning and I’m [only] going to gather clover honey.” They have mixed altogether. But if you do have your hives down around a swamp somewhere where there is lots and lots of poplar or either gallberries, then you can say, “I have honey that is more or less [poplar or] gallberry honey,” because you raised it where the gallberries are.<sup>124</sup>

Luke Elkins is also a lifelong trapper, representing a hunting tradition of the region. Raccoons are among the animals he traps, and he shared a description of how to make coon hash.

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<sup>123</sup> Luke Elkins, interview with Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 3, 2013.

<sup>124</sup> Luke Elkins, interview with Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 3, 2013.

... take this coon and cut him up like you do chicken or whatever, and put him in a pot and boil it off the bone. Take it off the bone and put it in lik ea biscuit pan, with high sides on it, and put your onions and your sage and your different seasonings in it. And then cover it with tin foil and put it in the oven and bake, dry it out a little bit. Stuff is delicious.<sup>125</sup>

These values relating to food are not limited to people who grew up in the region, but are shared by immigrants who have made Southeastern North Carolina their home. Nail salon owner Linda moved to Whiteville from Da Nang, Vietnam, in the 1990s. Researcher Anna McLean Scott writes, "Linda spends her Sundays tending her vegetable and herb garden in her back yard and cooking. In her garden, she grows melons, tomatoes, cucumbers, a variety of lettuces, basil, cilantro, and six different kinds of mint. [Her son] T says that their diet has always been comprised primarily of rice, vegetables from the garden, and supplemented with a few favorite traditional Vietnamese dishes."<sup>126</sup>

Special occasions are opportunities for a community to enjoy its distinctive food traditions. Jesse Bryant says of church association gatherings that featured homemade desserts made by congregation members, "It was just kind of a halleluia time, so to speak."<sup>127</sup>

For immigrant communities, sharing their culinary traditions during community gatherings can be an important part of maintaining ethnic heritage. Ricardo Hamagutchi, a Filipino resident of Southeastern North Carolina, talks about get-togethers featuring Filipino foods.

It's a kind of pot-luck kind of meal. So everybody brings something, and they basically share everything, and at the end, so that this food doesn't go to waste, they basically take everybody a little bit home so they can use it for the next meal. And religion is a very important part of this also. So every time we start a meal or something like that they do the prayers. Most of them are Catholic, so they do a Catholic prayer, basically a thank-you for the food and the friendship and everything. . .

This is one important thing that brings the Filipino to a place, is the food they have there. It's difficult for them to get used to the traditional American fast-food type of food. So they really love that Filipino cooking . . . <sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Luke Elkins, interview with Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 3, 2013.

<sup>126</sup> Linda Pham, profile by Anna McLean Scott

<sup>127</sup> Jesse Bryant, interview with Steve Kruger for NCFI, April 5, 2013

<sup>128</sup> Conversation with Anna McLean Scott for NCFI.

Elvira Jaimes, a tobacco plant worker and Hallsboro resident originally from Guerrero, Mexico, is a favorite cook in Columbus County's Latino community. Friends and neighbors often turn to her for help with meals for church events, soccer games, and quinceañera festivities. She describes some of the special dishes she makes for particular occasions, which have similarities to longstanding local favorites.

*A Navidad, comemos tamales, y pozole.*

*Las quinceañeras, hacemos barbacoa. Para preparar la vaca, use un guajillo, piña, cebolla, tomate, pimienta, clavo, laurel, tomillo, ajo, y todo se muele. Todos esos usas para la barbacoa. Sirven con arroz rosado y frijoles puercos.*

At Christmas, we eat tamales [cornmeal cooked in corn shucks or leaf wrappers] and pozole [hominy stew].

For *quinceañeras* [fifteenth-birthday celebrations], we make barbecue. To prepare the beef, use a guajillo chile, pineapple, onion, tomato, pepper, cloves, bay leaf, thyme, garlic; and grind it all together. You use all of those in barbecue. Serve it with red rice and *frijoles puercos* [beans cooked with sausage or other pork product].<sup>129</sup>

Several of Elvira Jaimes' recipes appear in the recipes section of this chapter.

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<sup>129</sup> Conversation with Anna McLean Scott for NCFI.

## Recipes

*From Linda Pham of Whiteville*

### **Mì Quảng (Noodles in the style of Quảng Nam Province, Vietnam)**

Pile in a bowl, in this order:

- Raw washed lettuces, watercress, purple basil
- Hot yellow rice noodles cooked in homemade chicken broth to package instructions
- Pork belly and shrimp pan-fried with green onions, salt, and 5-spice powder
- A ladle full of homemade chicken broth

Serve with (on table, for topping):

- Fresh mint
- Fresh cilantro
- Peanuts
- Sriracha
- Rice paper with black sesame seeds (cooked in microwave for one minute until crispy), eaten as a side like chips.<sup>130</sup>

*From Elvira Jaimes of Hallsboro*

Elvira's Chiles Rellenos [cheese-filled peppers]

Ingredients:

- 8 fresh poblano chile peppers
- 1.5 blocks *queso fresco* [Mexican cheese]
- 9 eggs
- Flour
- ½ medium-sized onion, diced
- 4 small tomatoes, diced
- 1 Tablespoon *caldo de pollo* [chicken broth] powder, or 2 chicken bouillon cubes
- 15 – 20 oz. sour cream
- Corn oil
- Toothpicks
- Plastic grocery bag

Stuffing the peppers:

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<sup>130</sup> Linda Pham, profile by Anna McLean Scott for NCFI

-Wash and dry chiles. On pan over highest heat setting, set peppers. Over the course of at least 20 minutes, cook and turn the chiles to allow as much of the skin to char as possible.

-As chiles finish blackening, transfer to a plastic grocery bag to steam as they are cooling off.

-When chiles are cool enough to touch, start to peel the blistered skin from the peppers. The skin is tough, paper-like, and not very tasty, so the goal is to remove as much as possible, but it won't be perfect. If it doesn't come off, it might need to be heated some more.

-Once peppers are peeled, use a knife or your fingers to make a slit down the side of the pepper, from near the stem to near the tip. Remove and discard the innards and seeds, leaving stem intact. Transfer peeled, gutted peppers to a bowl to wait to be stuffed.

-Slice cheese into slabs a little shorter than the length of the peppers, and about  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch by  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide. Start to fill peppers with slabs of cheese. Elvira fits about four big slabs per pepper. They should be full but with enough room for the seam to meet to be resealed.

-After peppers are stuffed, start to fasten them shut with toothpicks.

Fastening the peppers (like sewing):

- Pinch seam together (insides touching insides)
- Poke toothpick from one direction, through both layers, toward other
- Poke toothpick back through other side of pepper toward starting side, a few centimeters up the seam
- Keep fooling with it until it works. Even Elvira has stubborn ones.

Frying the chiles:

-Separate egg yolks from whites. Elvira does this by removing the tops of the shells and pouring the whites out, and letting the yolks remain in the shells for storage until use, because for this recipe she uses the whites first. Pour all 8 egg whites into a bowl. Beat with a blender until combined and foaming, about 30 seconds. Pour in the yolks, beat with a blender until all is combined and foamy, no longer.

-Heat about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch of oil in big frying pan with tall sides over medium-high heat, until it shimmers and splashes of water make it bubble.

-Have all your ingredients ready in assembly-line fashion: a plate of two or three handfuls of all-purpose flour, your bowl of egg batter, and the stuffed, sealed peppers. Start by rolling peppers in flour, then coat well with egg, then place in the pan. Fry peppers only one or two at a time. Make sure they are covered with oil by

pouring it on top of pepper with spoon, and rolling them on their sides. The point of this is only to set the eggs and seal the peppers, frying less than a minute total. Do this to all the peppers, and set aside on paper towels. Pour leftover egg mixture into oil at the end, and fry it too and pile in with the peppers.

Making the sauce:

-Get a very large frying pan or wide, squatty pot big enough to fit all the peppers in sauce. Over medium heat, sauté the diced onion and tomato in the pan until the onion is becoming translucent. (If it's a different pan than the frying was done in, use butter.) Add about a cup of water and the bouillon/caldo mix. Stir until dissolved. Add the sour cream, 3 or 4 heaping serving spoon scoops. Stir around until melted. This sauce should be the consistency of whole milk, a runny liquid. Add any water at the top of the sour cream tub, some milk and more water to thin out. Adjust salt.

-When the sauce is ready, make sure it's back to a simmer and add the peppers and leftover egg to the sauce. Cover and simmer a few minutes (or longer if you need time to make your tortillas), until cheese has time to soften and flavors have time to meld.

-Serve the peppers whole in bowls with sides, topped with the sauce and warm tortillas on the side. Elvira served with watermelon *agua fresca* on ice to drink.<sup>131</sup>

Elvira's Guerrero Style Tacos (also sometimes referred to as "Tacos Dorados")

Ingredients:

Tomatoes (~4 slices per person)

Onion (sliced and separated into rings)

1/2 Queso Fresco block grated

1/3 medium cabbage (thinly sliced and soaked in water 10 mins.) (or lettuce)

Elvira's Salsa (see recipe)

Elvira's Crema (see recipe)

2 chicken breasts, bone-in

50 mini corn tortillas (if store-bought, Elvira recommends Guerrero brand)

Corn Oil

Wooden Kebab Sticks

Salsa:

1-2 clove garlic

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3 serrano chiles or 2 jalapenos  
2 medium tomatoes  
salt

Crema:  
Sour cream  
Milk or water  
Salt

To prepare:

The chicken:

-Boil chicken breasts in salted water until cooked through. Pull off the bone and shred

with your hands. Elvira makes a big batch of chicken at once and keeps it in her fridge for different uses throughout the week. You may not use all of this chicken in this recipe.

*It is important to make evenly sized, stable tacos.*

The tortillas:

Elvira uses a thick metal sheet directly on her gas stove. Over high heat, toast tortillas until they start to brown in places. Adjust time to your pan and be sure not to burn. Flip and toast other side. On electric stove: toast the same way on a very hot ungreased pan. (Or make tortillas from scratch as Elvira does)

Rolling the tortillas:

Per tortilla, use about 3 big tablespoon scoops of chicken. Spread in an even line horizontally in the middle of the tortilla. Fold bottom half up and roll back, pulling chicken snugly down to the bottom. Roll upwards. Stab with wooden stick in the middle of the taco. Continue doing this and lining tacos down the stick. Put up to 10 per stick, leaving at least 1.5 inches on either side for handling.

Frying the tacos:

In a large frying pan, pour oil until 1/3 in. up the side of the pan. Heat oil until shimmering. Fry tacos on one side 2 - 2.5 minutes, flip and cook 2 - 2.5 minutes on the other or until golden. Place on plate with paper towels to cool. Do this until all tacos are cooked.

TO SERVE:

Place tacos in a line on a plate. Layer the following on top, leaving enough space uncovered on the ends of the tacos to allow for picking up with your hands.

In this order:

Elvira's Crema, drizzle liberally  
Cabbage, a good handful  
Elvira's Salsa, scooped according to heat preference  
Raw tomato slices and onion rings  
Big handful of queso fresco

#### SALSA RECIPE:

-Bring to a boil: 4 tomatoes to 2 jalapenos or 3 serrano chiles (all fresh, washed, sliced in half) nearly covered in water. Let simmer 10-20 minutes or until tomatoes and peppers have softened. With slotted spoon, transfer cooked tomatoes and chiles in blender with 1 large, fresh cloves of garlic (2 if small or old). Add salt to taste.

This ratio DEPENDS ON QUALITY OF PEPPERS. Adjust according to your taste and peppers of the moment.

#### CREMA RECIPE:

-sour cream  
-water or milk  
-salt

Mix water into sour cream until just runny enough to drizzle. Taste for salt.

#### Tortillas de Maíz

Elvira Jaimes

1 1/2 cups masa (corn flour)  
1/2 cup all-purpose flour

-Combine flours until evenly mixed. Add water and mix with hands until spongy.  
-Form into golf-ball sized balls and press with tortilla press. Grill on ungreased metal sheet over flame until browned and starting to bubble. Flip and repeat on other side. Serve immediately or save for recipes. Makes 50 tortillas.



Agua Fresca (de sandía)

Watermelon Juice

2/3 full blender of deseeded watermelon pulp

1/3 full blender water

sugar

Blend watermelon pulp until homogenous. Add water until desired drinkable consistency is reached. Pour into pitcher and add sugar to desired sweetness. She makes it sweet (1-2 cups). Serve cold over ice.

Elvira says that in Mexico, “jugo” or store-bought juice is not as common, and much less desirable than “aguas frescas”, cold drinks made of fresh pulverized fruit with water and sugar. She remembers in Guerrero having aguas frescas made with tamarind, jamaica (hibiscus flower), lime and horchata (rice), sold in stands on the streets. Watermelon and lime are the easiest ingredients for her to get in Columbus County.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Elvira Jaimes’ recipes recorded by Anna McLean Scott based on Jaimes’ demonstration and instructions.

## Conclusion

The information in the preceding pages represents only a small fraction of the overall folk culture of Bladen, Brunswick, and Columbus Counties, North Carolina. The full transcripts of interviews collected in this project, and archived by NCFI, include a wealth of information about the interviewees, their traditional knowledge, and the culture of the region. Archival sources—including the full run of *Kin'lin* magazine, as well as the many local history sources available (see bibliography)—contain still more documentation of area folk culture. Finally, and most important, the people of Brunswick, Columbus, and Bladen Counties are a living resource, bearers of the knowledge of their ancestors and the traditions that make Southeastern North Carolina the region of cultural richness that it is today.

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