



I got involved with the Cooleemee Historical Association when I was about ten years old.

That was about the same age my granddaddy was when he went to work in the cotton mill. It makes you think about how their world was different than today.

For the most part, if you didn't grow it or kill it, you didn't eat it. They didn't depend on their pay envelopes back then.

In those days, there wasn't much cash money. But if someone was in need, your pockets were open. They didn't have TVs and what was important was God, their children and work. Families were a lot tighter back then and work was harder. These are the traditions they've sent down to me.

Daniel Barney, 15
Grandson of Dewey "Fuzzie" Foster



Zack, Daniel, Bryson and Danielle have all been involved in local history work---as members of the Kids History Club, as Centennial reenactors or as campers and Counselors-in-Training at Kids Summer Heritage Camps.



"What learning their story has meant to me..."



I believe that people worked harder in those days.

They didn't go hungry because they grew gardens, hunted, killed hogs, had chickens---and they worked in the cotton mill and got paid.

My grandpa, Odell Neely, went to work at the cotton mill when he was ten years old. His first job was as a "water boy." That's how he got his nickname.

People lived in pretty much the same houses, except maybe the Zacharys. I believe people went to church more in those days.

Learning about Cooleemee's history and my own family has made me feel proud.

Bryson Brown, Age 14
Grandson of Odell Neely



I've gained a lot by knowing about how my ancestors lived in old Cooleemee.

Life was rougher then. Kids walked to school, walked anywhere they needed to go. Some quit school and went to work in the mill at a very early age. But factory work was slower then---when their work was caught up, the doffer boys would take breaks and go swim in the river.

Neighbors were like part of your family. Although people were poor, they didn't go hungry because they ate what their gardens produced.

Nobody had it better than anyone else. You weren't judged by how you dressed or what clothes you owned. I think this caused people to get along better. There was also a closeness that came from working together in the same work environment. This was small town life.

Although it was rougher back then, I think I would rather have lived in those times.

Zack Mason, Age 16
Grandson of Jim & Kay Taylor Osborne



My impression is that people in old Cooleemee were more self-sacrificing.

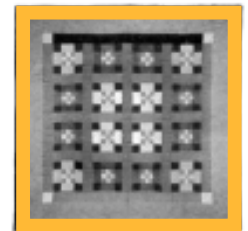
Even though they had many fewer choices---in food, clothes, school and entertainment---they seem to have led very fulfilling lives.

My great grandmother, Lezzora Williams O'Neal, went to work as a spinning room girl when she was very young. It makes me grateful that my parents make enough so that I can stay in school.

I've learned a lot about what this place was like. It was a real shame that the old Square was torn down. I know the older people lost a lot of memories when that happened.

We can't let this happen to the "Bullhole." I want to be able to go there and swim---and see kids enjoying the river when I grow up.

Danielle O'Neal, Age 15
Granddaughter of Frances & Leon O'Neal



CHA's "Discovering Our Heritage" project conducts educational programs for local youth. Photos of their grandparents L-R: "Fuzzie" Foster, Odell Neely, Jim & Kay Osborne, Francis & Leon O'Neal



When our elders tell their stories, there are many lessons that they hope we will learn and practice.

These mill town traditions, values and practices are being passed on to

Cooleemee's children through a special project called "Discovering Our Heritage." Through school heritage lessons for each grade, its annual Kids Summer Heritage Camp, history clubs and other special activities—children embrace tradition and gain a deep sense of place.



Top: 2005 Davie HS graduates Bryson Brown, Danielle O'Neal, Daniel Barney. Left: Zack Mason at the 2005 camp.



Discovering Their Heritage



School kids learn their cultural heritage



1998 Cooleemee Centennial Reenactors