

Oral History Project
for
Dr. Jackson

By Trent Lumpkin
March 22, 1995
History of a Southern Mill Town

The history of Cedartown is a long, proud one. My family is from Cedartown; therefore, I interviewed my grandmother, Hazel Virginia Lumpkin, who still resides in Cedartown. From the settling of the indians to the production of Cotton Export, the history of Cedartown has become an important part of Georgia's history.

One of the most remarkable landmarks in Cedartown is Big Spring. This noble limestone spring, the second largest in the south, has always been the center of life in this area because of its outstanding capacity of water. From the beginning of its earliest history, Polk county emerged in controversy between American indians. Both the Creeks and Cherokees claimed this spring. To settle the lines once and for all, there was a famous ball game at what is now known as ground georgia. The Creeks lost; furthermore, leaving Cedartown in the hands of the Cherokee nation. This is the foundation of Cedartown and Polk county's rice history.

The favorite meeting place of the indians was the limestone spring. After a chase or a hunt, they would return here to rest and hang their freshly killed deer from the boughs of the many cedar trees surrounding the Big spring. The indians use to call this area the "Valley of the Cedars"; therefore, the white man gave this land the name of Cedartown. Around the year 1842, the white man had already moved into this area and had taken

control.

The Pony Club, a notorious gang of thieves and outlaws, became powerful in this early stage of the white man's history in Cedartown. For two years this gang killed so many settlers and destroyed their homes, that those who survived did not stay and no one wanted to pass through. In 1843, a "concerted drive" finally disorganized the gang. A few years later the Battle family settled in Cedartown. He was a very wealthy man who owned 1500 slaves. He bought many acres of land from Esom Hill. This area still bears his name. At this time, the nearest railroad was at Madison, Georgia; Consequently, goods were extremely high because of transportation costs. Goods were delivered once a week with a regular route from Van Wert to Cedartown to Cave Springs and back.

In the 1850's and 1860's, Collard Valley was a flourishing community, in Cedartown, that was composed of well to do slave holders. In these early days of Cedartown, 'industry' meant hard work and devotion from farmers, the zeal of the merchants, and the perseverance

of the families who called this town home. The Industrial Era began in Cedartown in 1873. The Cherokee Iron Company was incorporated in Georgia by a special act of the legislator to manufacture pig iron. With the opening of this factory came the railroad.

Hazel Virginia Lumpkin was born on February 14, 1920. Her parents were Marion Carol and Emma Tylery Carol. She had four older sisters and four older brothers. They were all born in Cherokee, Alabama. Marion was a share cropper and raised cotton for money and grew what the family ate. The older children worked in the field beside their mother and father. Her dad was working on buying his farm. They swapped food for pay, and made all of their clothes.

These farmers usually had large families, for they needed children to work in their fields. When Hazel's father died, they were forced to move to Cedartown for financial opportunities. The girls were sixteen and over. This enabled them to work in the cotton export mill. The young boys found the same job opportunities in the Goodyear Mill. Few blacks worked at these mills and

were hardly seen in town. Most of the people who worked in the mill resided in the Mill Village. The bosses lived the closest to the factory. The Mill Village operated a church, the Anna Kregge Memorial Methodist Church, that many mill workers found peace and escape in. All of the stores in the town were privately owned. The Harpest Home, helped homeless children by educating and providing shelter for them. The mill and church was the backbone of the community. The mill owned all of the housing in the area; therefore, the employees rented from the mill. The people that lived in the Mill Village always had a sense of pride for their community. These people were given the nickname "Lentheads" and were made fun of by the upper class. At this period of time, people stayed within their classes. Children usually grew up to take over their parents jobs in the mill. My grandmother and one of her brothers were the first mill children to graduate from the high school in Cedartown.

These peoples lives revolved Around the mill, for they worked such long hours and a whole family worked in the same mill. Their houses were also centrally located.

The mill workers supported the Democratic party because they believed this party would improve their situations. They referred to the Republican party as the "Catholic Baby Bashers" and did not trust the party. Another myth that the mill people believed was that they worked longer and harder than the people in the North. The mill managers pushed these myths on the workers since they had no education.

Goodyear planned recreation for their employees, in order to establish close friendships between the workers. They believed that if there was more interaction between the workers, then their production rate would increase. The Mill hired everyone in a family and opened the door for population increase in Cedartown. When the mill came into town, there were only 5,000 citizens. When the mill began operation, the population doubled to 10,000. The taxes on the mill helped pay for the public school system, roads, and the railroads.

Life at the mill was not always this easy. Later on, the mill started laying off people. The workers realized the need for a union; therefore, my uncle, Luther

Carol, formed the first union in Cedartown to secure job stability. Later in the mills history, laborers tried to incorporate Afro Americans into the town, but they never got treated fairly. The mill went out of business before Equal Rights Laws were established and enforced.

The Mill played a major part in my grandmother's life. It provided her education and job security. She even came to know her future husband in the mill. She believes the mill made her family emotionally strong and close. Eventhough my grandmother describes the mill people as "cigarette smoking, snuff dipping" people, they were proud of their work, and worked hard.

- 1) "A Quarter Century of Textile Progress" Jun. 1951
vol. 1, pg 1-16.
- 2) "Polk County" The Cedartown Standard Thur, Nov 9, 1928
No. 142, by James I. Parker.
- 3) "History of Cedar Valley" The Cedartown Standard
Mar. 16, 1962 by L. H. Walthall.
- 4) "Polk" The Cedartown Standard Tue Nov 7, 1928
No. 146 by A.C. Duke Sr.
- 5) "Cedartown's first School and Public Hangings" The Cedartown
Standard Thur. Nov 9, 1928 No. 147
- 6) Tapes by Hazel Lumpkin and Trent Lumpkin