

YARBOROUGH FAMILY PORTRAIT – Bell Yarborough  
1st from left. (Photo courtesy of Mary Stephenson)

## Bell Yarborough

The first time I ever went to the mill I didn't know how to go in it and my brother told me how. He was at the entry at the top of the steps waitin' on me. He was spinnin' and I didn't know what it was, but I wanted to do what he was doin'. I wanted to try and I did. I went in with a little white all over apron on and barefooted. I reckon maybe I was 'bout 8 years old. He'd show me how to do spin, and 'fore stoppin' time that evenin' I was puttin' ends up myself. They'd send hirin' hands from mills to other mills to hire help, but they wasn't allowed to do it. But that might be how Papa found out about Lando.

I never did go to school. What I learnt, Papa learnt me at home with a little blue back book. There was three of us that stayed at home. Now our oldest brother after he growed up, about 13 or 14, he left home. After they all married that just left me and my daddy at home. We kept house and I worked. He done my house work, cooking and everything. He worked in the mill 'til he got disabled. He was wounded in the war and sometimes he'd be on his crutches for 2 or 3 months at a time.

My sister went to school some, but if we'd a stayed in the country we'd a' all got a education. But us three youngins, we had to go to work to make a livin' for my daddy got where he wasn't able to work. They didn't make nothing back then. They didn't get but 10¢ a side for spinnin' and if we didn't

get but one side, we worked 12 hours a day for a dime. When we was just learnin', they'd put us on one side then when we got to where we got kinda learnt then they'd put us on more. The section hands that fixed the machines made about 40¢ a day. And then they had a overseer and he made about 80¢ a day. Fred Hefner was the section hand when I was spinnin'.

Whenever I retired, I was working in the weave room for about 20 years. When I retired I was goin' on 66 years. They shut down our section of looms and I knowed I's gonna have to quit. He asked me 'bout runnin' them big looms what they call C-4's and I told him I couldn't do it, just to let 'em lay me off, and I'd stay at home. I wasn't gonna try to run them for I knowed 'most I couldn't 'cause I couldn't hold out at it. My blood was runnin' up and I was done old enough to retire. I was out a good while and they was gonna start my looms back up and Mr. Yarborough come up there to the house and asked me did I want to go back to work – said they was gonna start my looms back up. But he didn't know where they'd run two weeks or three or how long they'd run. I told them "No!" I wasn't goin' back down there. I didn't miss it a bit. I didn't go back then and I ain't been back yet in 20 years since I retired. Twenty years 'cause I'm 86 now. I knowed I'd worked there might near all my life and it was time to get outa' there when I could.

It didn't seem bad on me to get up of the morning and go to work. We had 35 minutes to eat dinner then. When my daddy was livin' he'd always have dinner ready at 12 o'clock and we'd always go home, eat dinner, maybe sit down there with him a little while, then the call whistle'd blow 15 minutes. Well, then we'd go on back to the mill and go to work. We

didn't have no other breaks. We wasn't too tired when we got through. We'd come home and maybe light out to see the neighbors. People would just get together and enjoy themselves.

The boss man had to get my sister a little box to stand on to reach the top wheel of the ropin'. She stand on it to wipe her ropin' or to set it in. Children worked just like grownups and some of 'em had to work at night – then the little 'uns worked at night. Clarence Irby, over there, we was raised up together – me and my sister and him and Sid. We was all might near the same size. They seem more like kin people 'cause we was raised up together. They had a good mother and a good aunt too, Aunt Sally Adams. They was just like our Mama. They'd see about us and see to fixin' our clothes 'til we got up where we could do ourselves. If one would get sick, why it look like might near everybody'd take a hand in it. They didn't mind goin' no time, day or night, to help out.

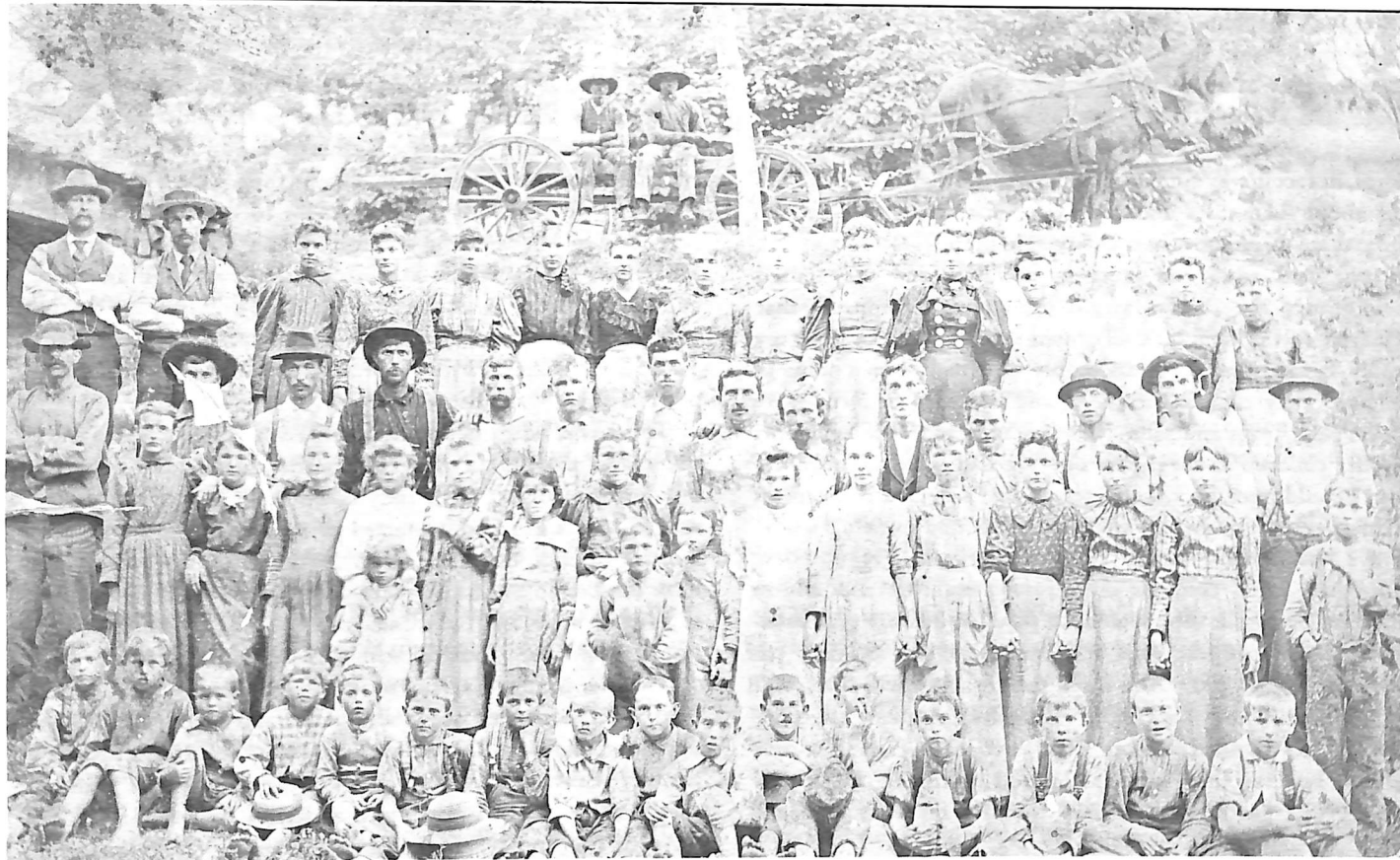
Back then they had a old wooden church where the Methodist church is now. Well the Baptist didn't have 'nary 'on. It was a Union Church – Methodist one Sunday and Baptist the next. They just all worked together and had good times down there. Had some of the best meetins' I ever did hear.

Girls didn't do no swimmin' back then. The most I ever went under the water was when I was baptized, in a pool right behind the Methodist church down there where that spring is. Preacher Bennett baptized me and Curt Gwinn, Helen Bolton's mother, at the same time. They had white sheets up for the tent.

Me and Molly Ramsey worked together for I don't know how many years. The spinnin' was in rows-so many to a alley, and we worked right side and side together. My spinnin' was next to the door and her'n was right next to me. When we had our work caught up we could set down and rest any time we wanted to, or we could go out on the gangway outside the door. They didn't care.

There use to be houses over there cross the creek. White people lived over there when we come here and lived there for years. The Roddeys and the Bighams, Doug and Rose and them's family, they lived over there. Over here at Lando, h'it was just a few old houses here and they had about nine houses over there. Whenever we moved here it wasn't nothin' but just them few old houses. 'Course 'bout all them done been burnt down and tore up. So the white people lived over there 'cross the creek. It was a nice place then and they kept it nice. There wasn't but one house in "Happy Holler" when we come here. That one that "Blue" lives in was a old house and that across the street that burned down was here. They wasn't but a few houses here. After they started to bulding these houses on the hill, those people livin' 'cross the creek could move over here. All the white people moved out. Well, then they let the colored people that worked in the mill, pickin' waste and things, they let them move in over there.

I always loved to work--spinnin', spoolin', windin', twisters and reels. Well I learnt all that up there myself, just watchin' the rest of 'em. I always did love it.



*The workers in Manetta Mills at the turn of the 20th century. Note horse drawn wagon hauling timber to be used to power the mill. (Photo courtesy of Ola Stroud)*