

LANDO ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Back in 1977 Charles and Judy Inabinet showed up in the Chester County mill town of Lando to do an oral history project sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, the South Carolina Arts Commission and Springs Industries.

The project's aim was to document the people through interviews and photographs. The Inabinets wanted to portray Lando as it had been and to do this they interviewed the oldest people in the village.

Edna Smith had vivid memories of various kinds of chills that hit the people. She said that there were "hard shaking chills and dumb chills" and people took a chill tonic. But worse even than the chills was the big flu epidemic that swept the world and hit Lando hard. Edna had the flu along with three others in her family. They all survived but there were a number who didn't. She remembered seeing trucks "piled way up high and caskets tied down and carrying them [the bodies] to cold storage."

George Ferguson grew up in the Happy Holler section of Lando. He went to work in the mill when he was 12. He swept, carried filler or any sort of odd job for several years before graduating to doffing (removing filled spindles and inserting replacements). One of Ferguson's most vivid memories was when the Great Flood of 1916 swept away the Fishing Creek Bridge and flooded the mill's boiler room. It took some time for the water to go down enough to fire the boilers again.

Ferguson recollected an old-timer telling him that before the mill was bought (1889) by Benjamin Dawson Heath the mill employed a man whose job was to keep the lanterns filled with oil and the globes clean. He also brought in wood and built fires in heaters. When the Heaths put in electricity and the light bulbs turned on, "the old fellow jumped around and took to hollering, 'Who lit up all the lamps at one time?'

Lela Rainer was 9-years-old when her family abandoned farming for mill work. She remembered that her daddy worked for 90 cents a day and her mother about that much. Lela's pay for working in the spinning room was 15 cents a day. Life was more exciting in the mill village than living on a farm. Lela had good memories of fourth of July picnics, ball games, Easter egg hunts and box suppers.

Some of the old photographs that were collected and copied by the Inabinets appeared in the TAP Journal which was published in Lancaster in 1977. The photographs included group pictures of workers in Manetta Mills in the 1890s, the Lando String Band as it appeared in 1927 and early school pictures.

A 1937 pay envelope revealed that J. L. Wallace was paid \$9.11 for his week's work with 9 cents deducted for "lost time." There was a picture of the two sides of a mill-issued coin made of aluminum that the workers called a loonie. On one side the coin was printed Manetta Mills and Lando, SC. On the reverse were the words Good for Merchandise.

Hundreds of pictures were brought in to be copied by Susan Meiselas who had a grant from the Polaroid Foundation to teach photography to the children of Lando. The children took pictures of all the residents living in Lando. These pictures and the old ones of the mill community were put on exhibit in the pool hall. There were only about 300 people living in Lando in 1977 but around 600 people showed up to see the pictures.

Judy Inabinet was surprised by the people's enthusiasm for sharing the old pictures. Judy wrote that, "People would say, 'Well I know there's some pictures up in the closet but I can't get up there anymore.' So we'd climb in the closets and crawl under the bed. And we found that with every picture there was a story and everybody wanted to tell that story."