

(The State of South Carolina Museum, Riverbanks, in 1988 invited citizens to contribute the story of their lives to be placed in a time capsule. I sent the following.)

27 October 1985

Rock Hill, S.C.

Open letter to the people of South Carolina in 2088:

My name is Louise Pettus. I am enclosing a copy of my identification cards that I carry in my billfold daily. That copy should allow you to deduce my vital statistics, if you are interested in them. Maybe the data banks of materials that this society seems to now collect and maintain will give you more information about me in 2088 but it will not be in the same form.

What those xeroxed cards do not tell you is what I value and what I do from day to day. In this letter I shall try, to my limited ability, to explain my life in the context of its time and its place. Parenthetically, I wish that some of my ancestors had done this one hundred or two hundred years ago. The thought strikes me that you will find my use of language and expression as quaint (but not nearly as charming) as I find the writing of two hundred years ago.

ANCESTRY: My father was Calvin Hall Pettus (February 10, 1901- July 2, 1949). He was the son of James Lawrence Pettus, 1861-1939, and Carrie Lee Hall, 1869-1930. My mother is still living, a very vigorous 81 year old woman. Her father was William John Thomas Rodgers (1876-1973) and Eudisia Jane Perry Rodgers.

On my paternal side of the family my ancestors bear the surname of: Bailes, Burton, Cruse, Dabney, Dillard, Foil, Glenn, Hall, Knox, Messenger, and, I think, though cannot prove, Hunter and Coltharp. On my maternal side, I have the surnames of Allen, Cooke, Hawkins, Hill, Lanier, Massey, Moore, Morrow, Parks, Perry, Riggins, Rodgers, Rooker, Sparks, Spears, Swim; Watson. Almost all of these have been traced back to Virginia, or to Ireland, but one line (the Cruse, Foil, Messenger) is German in origin. Anyone who wishes to go further will probably find them among the documents of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City.

It might be of some interest to say that until my father's day, all of the Pettuses made their living off the soil. From Thomas Pettus, member of the Royal Council of Virginia, who came in 1640 through my grandfather James Lawrence "Lon" Pettus, they were farmers. My father started out farming but branched out in cotton ginning and general merchandising about 1933. When he died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1949, I took over the management of the cotton gin and general store. I was then 22 years of age and I managed that business successfully for the next five years. That, more than anything, I think, gave me confidence that a woman could operate in a man's world. After that experience I was not afraid to try anything.

My earliest memories relate to the farm I was born on which was in upper Lancaster County, in a community called Belair in the Indian Land district. My father got 102 acres, I think it was, from his father. We grew cotton, corn, grain

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(The State of South Carolina Museum, Riverbank, in 1982 invited citizens to

(either wheat or oats, or both), sugar cane, all with two mules and plows and a wagon. There were black tenant farmers in two houses on my father's land. The ones I remember best were Aunt Rene and her grandchildren named Esterlene, Frank, Mattie, etc. who lived with her, Cleve Limas and his family, Ev. Cureton and his daughter Blonnie who had a family of her own and Phoenix Cureton who once got in trouble with the law. I remember the sheriff's posse coming after him. And then there was the children's favorite, Hazel Mobley. Hazel is dead now and had no children but had two or three wives. He hitched up the ponies for my brothers, gave us rides on the mules, took us with him in the truck to pick up cotton and, most of all, talked to us and loved us.

My grandfather and grandmother Pettus lived across the road and up the highway (now #521) which I can remember being paved with concrete. The records say that was 1930, so I was only four years old. Their house on the hill was called the "Big House" by their five houses of negro tenants. It was not so big but did have nice features like a big wide hall down the center and a wrap-around porch that went around the front and two sides. It did not have a regular second floor but an unfinished large attic that was reached by stairs through one of the bedrooms through a door that looked like a closet door. My father said that when he was a boy that some of the kids slept on pallets up there hugging the big old chimney for warmth in the winter and next to the two windows in the summer. The halls had oak wainscoating and a large oak hall stand with mirrors and a coat rack and umbrella stand built in. There was a wooden telephone base on the wall next to the front door. The house was sold years ago and the new owners did not bother to put a roof on it when it needed it. Not too long ago I walked into the abandoned house and saw where the whole dining room area had fallen in from the ceiling but other parts of the house were still sound. Now it is torn down. A pity, for it could be restored as are many nowadays.

Up the road, less than a mile, was my grammar school where we had three classrooms with two grades each. A big wooden school with the gymnasium on the second floor. The fourth classroom had the seventh grade in it. There, my Aunt Vallie, my father's oldest sister, who was the wife of Tillman Wilson, held forth. She taught school for 35 years and because the Pettus and Wilson families were so large, she taught about everybody of the right generation. She influenced us all and is still remembered affectionately.

I went to Indian Land High School which stopped with the eleventh grade. According to my grades, I was not the best of students. I failed algebra and biology, as I recall. I also got medals for excellence in history and geometry. Just before my last high school year, the school burned to the ground. We were all bused to Van Wyck where the school was not large enough for us all and we had typing classes on the auditorium stage. I got up to 95 words a minute on a two minute timed test and, illogically, believed that I was cut out to be a business major in college. My father thought that a fine idea and so when I went to Winthrop College in 1942 I declared myself as a business major. That lasted about one semester; I switched to history which I enjoyed very much more.

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South Carolina. Dr. Robert Lee Meriwether, chairman of the history department and head of the South Caroliniana Library requested an outstanding Winthrop student to earn her way by working in his library while earning a master's degree. I think I was the second-ranked history major at Winthrop and that the other had a better scholarship elsewhere; anyway, I took the offer and it made a really big impact on me. I got into the more rarefied air of a university, for one thing. The history department at the University of South Carolina had a top-notch reputation and Dr. Meriwether became like a second father to me and the other graduate students who worked for him. I did not particularly aim at a degree so much as something that allowed me to have the fun of school and work that was so pleasant. By 1954, as I worked off and on and ginned cotton, too, Dr. Meriwether advised me to go ahead and write my thesis for I never knew when the master's degree might be handy. How right he was! I wrote my thesis on European Immigration to South Carolina, 1880-1907, and received my master's degree in 1954.

I fell in love with a fellow graduate student, Tom Hall, or Thomas Radcliffe DeSaussure Hall, to string his distinguished ancestry together. It was not the best of matches and finally we both realized it and called off the wedding by mutual consent. He died several years later of nephritis. Not until years later did I discover from one of Tom's friends that Tom "staged" the breakup quarrel in order to not force me to go ahead with a wedding to one who had already discovered he had only a short time to live. It is with some chagrin that I admit that my motivation for breaking up the engagement was not as noble as his but, then, I probably was not nearly so much a romantic as he. As a practical type, I realized that Tom's idealism and private school background would not mesh very well with my more average and practical farm girl background. I probably suffered less from the return of the engagement ring than he did.

Suddenly freed of cotton gin and engagement ring, I fled to a teaching assignment on the Mexican border at Douglas, Arizona. Seven years in Douglas, one at Ajo, and one at Coolidge, were great years for me. I loved everything after a brief bout of homesickness--the desert, the climate, the people I met and associated with. Finally, though, I wanted to get out of high school and into junior college and I managed that through a fellow I had known at USC graduate school who was then dean of a junior college in Florida. Two years at Orlando Junior College and I applied for a teaching position in teacher training at Winthrop College and got the job.

I came to Winthrop in 1968. They have been interesting and fulfilling years. While most of my work has been in the education division I have also taught history and that is what I am doing now.

I am also writing. My major achievement is a book, Pictorial History of Lancaster County, that I have done with my friend and housemate, Martha Bishop. Martha did all of the darkroom work and much of the photography. I helped with copying some of the old pictures. It was a creative achievement for both of us. We are extremely pleased that it has received universal praise.

I also write a weekly newspaper column with Ron Chepesiuk, the college archivist. The public affairs office of Winthrop releases the column to local newspapers over the state. An estimated 55 have carried it periodically. About

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30 newspapers carry it regularly. We also do a weekly (Sunday) column for the York Observer, a local arm of the large Charlotte Observer which serves this area. I also write for several newsletters—one put out by the South Carolina Surveyors Association and another newsletter by the Association of Executives made up of presidents of many South Carolina companies.

The Lancaster book and the column have attracted other offers. The Rock Hill Red Cross has requested me to write a history of their organization and they have requested a grant to cover the cost. I understand that the Springs Industries giant which just merged with Lowenstein and Sons wants us to do a history of Springs Mills first 100 years. That is a more certain offer—and even more intriguing—than the Red Cross history.

Also, I am researching Winthrop College history for its bicentennial history which is being authored by Dr. Ross Webb. Mostly I collect data and am reading every issue of the Rock Hill Record (1904---) for Winthrop items. When I finish (nine more rolls to go) with the Record, I will start on the Rock Hill Herald, now known as the Evening Herald.

I write all of this detail not just through sheer ego, of which I do have a sufficient amount, but because I want to give some insight to the working woman's routine in 1985.

And, oh yes, we are all into the computer age, or The Information Age, having, we believe, left the Industrial Age, circa 1954 (only we didn't know it then.) Two years ago our secretarial pool of five women were "introduced" to computers and given free instruction. Only one pursued the matter and became proficient. Now, two of the original five are gone and the other three are being ordered to learn how to use computers. The implication is that secretarial work can no longer be done without such skills. One--the supervisor--will probably manage to avoid this until she retires. One secretary will quit---she has already closed her door to the world with a sign on it: "Knock before entering." The new workers recently hired are all working diligently at honing their word processing skills.

For myself, I am using an Apple IIC, a small portable that I have had "souped up" from its original 128K to 512K by buying an Appleworks Expansion board to replace the original motherboard--installed for me by my colleague Everett Stallings, who had to called Applied Engineering in Texas in order to finally get it into the very tight quarters. My monitor is an Amdek Color 500 and my printer is an Imagewriter, an Apple product. It is not the latest or the best of the art but I am fascinated by what I can do in comparison to just the typewriter and have not yet mastered just the one Appleworks program which gives me word processing, a data base, and a spreadsheet. I have not learned to program and am not certain I ever will--or need to.

I am an avid newspaper reader--cut my teeth on the Charlotte News which just this week went out of business after 97 years and has been absorbed by the Charlotte Observer. I learn through print--or through the eye--and pay little attention to television as deliverer of information although I follow it for amusement. My housemate is now watching her favorite football team, the Washington Redskins, led by aging John Riggins, against another major club. The baseball World Series is on this week and the last game today will determine

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whether the St. Louis Cardinals or the Kansas City Royals are the world champions. Those are diversions.

My favorite thing is my correspondence with other local history researchers and family history researchers. We share information and I put much of it into my computerized data base. My good friend, Miss Nancy Crockett of the "Waxhaws" area of Lancaster County shares my enthusiasm. She is a retired school principal and the only person alive still living in the Waxhaws who is descended from the original settlers of the 1750s. She keeps up the Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Churchyard with its tombstones that go back to 1755 and include the markers to Andrew Jackson's parents, Gen. William Richardson Davie, founder of the University of North Carolina, Robert Leckie's stonework (he designed the Lands Ford Canal.) Because the old tombstones are so fragile she has gotten black and white photographs of the major stones. Also, the New England Gravestone Society has fine black and white copies.

My home church is Belair United Methodist in Lancaster County. I enjoyed doing the historical research on that church. I found that it was originally called Mount Ararat Methodist Episcopal Church and that the Rev. Adam Ivy got a lease from David and Eliza Hagins for \$1 in 1835. My other favorite is Old Six Mile Presbyterian Church. It is abandoned now but the cemetery is well kept. There was an older one about a mile and a half away which originally covered several acres and had nearly 200 stones but now only a half dozen survive. My James McKnight Morrow and wife Susannah Watson were buried there and so was her father, Lt. Drury Watson, all natives of Virginia.

I want to include the fact that my ancestor Samuel Knox held the first recorded Indian lease. It was in the first book, now lost, that was kept by the agent Charles Miller. The lease was taken out in 1783 and recorded in 1785.

I have no children to read this account but I have two nephews, Gray Bellamy who is now a sophomore here at Winthrop, son of my sister Peggy, and Stephen Pettus, a tenth grade student, son of my brother Calvin Hall Pettus, Jr. Stephen has a older sister, Lisa Carol who married Luther Wilson Roscoe, now divorced, and they have two children, Michael and Jennifer Roscoe. Perhaps their children and grandchildren will be interested in all of this.

Perhaps someone living in Indian Land in 2085 will be interested. If they are interested in tracing the land records, the house where I was born is in 1985 recorded in the tax assessor's office under the names David Lindsay Pettus and Mildred Louise Pettus. The house my mother now lives in is under her name, Bessie Rodgers Pettus and my name, Louise Pettus. The house Stephen lives in is under the name of his mother, Mary Chandler Pettus. Lisa lives in Charlotte. Gray Bellamy's father, Roderic Cortland Bellamy, lives in the Belvedere suburb of North Augusta, S. C. and his mother has remarried and her name is Mrs. Michael Grow and they are living in Augusta, Ga. on Henry Street.

I am a Democrat and began my interest in politics in the era of Franklin D. Roosevelt. I was a great admirer of him and still do. I have been faithful to the party over the years. Other than Roosevelt, I have most liked Jimmy Carter, an honest and decent man. I also admire Rosalind Carter. She came to Winthrop to speak last year. The audience was very attentive and absorbed in her message.

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I want to include the fact that my ancestor Sumner Knox held the first recorded Indian lease. It was in the first book, now lost, that was kept by the agent Charles Miller. The lease was taken out in 1783 and recorded in 1785. I have no children to read this account but I have two nephews, Gary Bellamy who is now a sophomore here at Winthrop, son of my sister Peggy, and Stephen Feltz, a fourth grade student, son of my brother Calvin Feltz. Stephen has an older sister, Lisa Carol who married Luther Wilson Roscoe, now divorced, and they have two children, Michael and Jennifer Roscoe. Perhaps their children and grandchildren will be interested in all of this.

Perhaps someone living in Indian Land in 2085 will be interested. If they are interested in tracing the land records, the house where I was born is in 1922 recorded in the tax assessor's office under the names David Lindsay Pettus and Mildred Louise Pettus. The house my mother now lives in is under her name. Beas Kodgers Pettus and my name, Louise Pettus. The house Stephen lives in is under the name of his mother, Mary Chandler Pettus. Lisa lives in Charlotte. Gary Bellamy's father, Robert Conrad Bellamy, lives in the Belvidere suburb of North Augusta, S.C. and his mother has remarried and her name is Mrs. Michael. Now and they are living in Augusta, Ga. on Henry Street.

I am a Democrat and began my interest in politics in the era of Franklin D. Roosevelt. I was a great admirer of him and still am. I have been faithful to the party over the years. Other than Roosevelt, I have most liked Jimmy Carter, an honest and decent man. I also admire Ronald Carter. She came to Winthrop to include the markers to Andrew Jackson's personal Gen. William Richardson Davis, Wesleyan Presbyterian Churchyard with its tombstones that go back to 1722 and described from the original settlers of the 1720s. She keeps up the Old School principal and the only person alive still living in the Winthrops who is "Well-known" area of Lancaster County shares my enthusiasm. She is a retired my computerized data base. My good friend, Miss Nancy Crockett of the and many history researchers. We share information and I put much of it into my favorite thing is my correspondence with other local history researchers divisions. Those are divisions.

I detest Ronald Reagan and consider him a cheap cowboy actor who cares little for the mass of Americans but uses words to manipulate.

The nation is too materialistic, I feel. There is little saving and little concern for tomorrow. My basic instincts go back to Jefferson---I do not feel that we have the right to indebt future generations. I hope your generation does not suffer from my generation's selfishness. We have great abundance and waste it. It is sad.

I wish I could crawl off these pages and look around and see you readers and your surroundings. Instead, I can only hope that I have given you a little insight into the past.