

BAILEY, NORTH CAROLINA: A RURAL
COMMUNITY ANALYZED

by

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To place ourselves in proper perspective to Bailey, a small town of approximately 795 persons in the heart of North Carolina's tobacco producing belt, the history of this ~~rural~~ community must be analyzed.

The history of this community dates back to the 18th century when Drewey Bailey settled in the area. Bailey Township of Nash County was named for the Bailey family and the town was called Bailey when it was incorporated in 1908.

Some residents of Bailey differ in their understanding of the origin of the town's name. One story goes that during the Civil War there was an area called Bailey's Mustering Grounds on the outskirts of the present town owned by a family named Bailey. The area was used by the Confederate Army as an assembly grounds and hospital for wounded soldiers. According to this story, which is not in total conflict with the forementioned, the town was named Bailey after an established ~~family~~ family in the area. There are Baileys living in the community today.

According to another story, which many residents consider more reliable, Bailey was established as a railroad depot by the Norfolk and Southern Railroad. The history of this community reveals that the railroad was first established as the Raleigh-Pamlico Railroad. It was to be built by the sale of bonds to the residents of each township the railroad crossed. According to available information, this plan failed to materialize and the rights to build the railroad were purchased by the Norfolk and Southern. This company agreed to run the railroad through the

Area that is now Bailey if the family which owned a vast amount of property in this area would lay out the town and grant the railroad a right of way as well as alternate lots along the railroad property. Supporting evidence is not available to verify whether this arrangement was successful. The community got it's railroad, however. Built in 1907 by prison labor, in October of that the year the first train, as special to the North Carolina State Fair in Raleigh, composed of five cars, departed form Bailey at 9:00 A. M. With a full load of passengers, even some in the baggage car, the train arrived at the end of its 40 mile journey three hours later.

A railroad official of Norfolk and Southern by the name of Bailey was extremely interested in the development of this community as a depot and service center for the surrounding farmlands. It is said that the town was named in honor of this man when the town was chartered in 1908.

The town was granted a Post Office by the Federal Government when established. It serves the town and the rural community surrounding the community.

A new area arose for Bailey in 1913. The town as getting its first school. The death of Rock Springs School, a three-room building a mile from the town of Bailey, had given birth to Bailey School, a two story frame building with six rooms downstairs and an auditorium upstairs. On each side of the form entrance were cloakrooms, one for the boys; one for the girls, forerunners of the present-day lockers.

Into this modern, roomy building came three teachers,

teaching primary, grammar grade, and high school subjects to students of all ages who sat on boards laid across blocks or nail kegs and learned reading, writing, and arithmetic to the rhythm of dangling legs.

One of the teachers recalls that there were no grades in those days, no overcrowded rooms, no permanent records, no outstanding extra-curricular activities, but she adds, there were problems; attendance was poor, fights on school grounds were not unusual and sanitary conditions were appalling. Baths, to many of the youngsters, were summertime propositions; inhabited heads were common sights, and itch was ever prevalent.

The first high school graduating class from Bailey High School was in May 1918, As the first class, seven strong, received their diplomas, the town was in its proudest hour.

By 1922 the school had enlarged to the point that the 1913 building was no longer adequate. Bailey had inherited High School, and three buses were bringing children in from the surrounding areas. The time had come for a new building. The old building was moved to one side and the teachers taught here, in churches, and empty store rooms, In January 1924, the new school was inhabited by a staff of twelve teachers.

In 1926 Bailey became heir to Mt. Pleasant High School, thus bringing the enrollment to 413, the number of buses to 6, and the teachers to 14. The curriculum was expanded to include a home economics department and music. A school paper was published this year.

Atheletics came into prominence in 1926, with basketball being the first organized sport. Later baseball, Tennis, and vollyball were added. Basketball has been the most successful with the Bailey teams being highly recognized for their achievements through the years.

In the fall of 1931, Bailey adopted its last school, Mannings. The enrollment passed 500 for the first time. The enrollment today is about 650. The present enrollement shows that over the past 25 years, the enrollment has increased very little. The average attendance is up enough that the school requires a teaching staff of approximately 25 teachers. It was during these years that Bailey established its first program in vocational agriculture. The PTA was established in 1935. It is a vital part of institutional education in the community today.

As the years passed the school curriculum expanded to include a commercial department. Established in 1941, this department is recognized as one of the outstanding commercial departments of any rural school in the state. The following year the school had its first cafeteria or "lunch room". The school newspaper, THE BUGLE, has received national recognition for many years.

In 1932, all married women teachers were asked to resign; however, the following year the community agreed that married status did not enhance their effectiveness, so from that time, married teachers have been permitted to teach in the local school.

Today the town is adjusting to the fact that having a local high school as a part of the community is about over. Because of

the demands for higher and more specialized education, the students in the Bailey School district are to consolidate with the schools from adjacent areas in to a larger, regional complex several miles away. Although the residents realize this is necessary, it comes as a blow to a community fighting to maintain its identity as a progressive rural service center.

As is evident, Bailey is predominately a farming community. A feedmill and lumber mill are located in the town to meet the needs of the agrarian surroundings. There are several established merchants orientated to supplying the farm community with all needed supplies for the agricultural industry. It is estimated that about 80% of the towns income can be accounted to farmers in the area.

One of the first merchants in Bailey was Malachi Bissette. His store was one of the largest in the area. It was quite typical of the general store carrying "everything needed from birth to death-- farm supplies, groceries, clothes, and coffins. Several of the first buildings of the town are still occupied. The concrete blocks used in building the first buildings-- the post office, drugstore, and several merchant's establishments-- were made near the building sites on the adjacent block.

Even in agriculture, Bailey has had its failures. Bailey had established itself as a small, but promising tobacco market until the depression of the 1920's. Once in a four-day sale, the Bailey market set the highest price per pound average ever established in the United States. At this time the town had two warehouses, but both were forced to close. The town has never been able to

reestablish itself as a market for the number one crop produced in the area.

At one time when cotton was important money crop, there was a large cotton gin operating in the town. As the production of cotton dropped drastically, the entire town was affected. Today the gin is still in operation, but it is not a major source of revenue for the town. In the mid-50's a livestock market was established in Bailey, but this had to be phased out because of competition from surrounding towns. In the 20's the livery stable business was a very productive enterprise. At one time there were four independently established stables, buying and selling horses and mules, in Bailey. At the beginning of World War II, farming was rapidly mechanized as tractors came into widespread use and the stable business was forced out.

In the area of non'agricultural industry, Bailey has little industry. The present mayor blames this limitation of industry on the town's limited water supply. Bailey does have two garment factories, the Bailey Garment Plant and Quality Textiles which employ 150 persons combined. The leading non-agricultural industry of the area in Neverson Quarry of the Superior Stone Company. The Quarry came into existence in 1913 by an act of Congress. In that year Congress authorized a harbor of refuge for ships in case of storms at Cape Lookout on the North Carolina Coast. This necessitated the erection of a two long sea wall behind which ships could seek protection. Furnishing stone for this breakwater lead to the opening of the Quarry. Since that time the Quarry has been

open at irregular intervals.

While closed following the completion of the Cape Lookout project, a ruling by the State Highway Commission's engineering department requiring a certain hardness of pairing stone for all roads in North Carolina lead the Bryan, Monroe Company to reopen the quarry. It is a source of the Hardest stone in the Stat.

In 1948, the company changed its name to Bryan Rock and Sand company. Under this and the Superior Stone Company leadership, the quarry has become one of the largest and most modern granite crushing plants, in the South. It is understood that the supply of stone in the area is inexhaustible. There is an average of two train loads of stone shipped from the quarry daily. This large shipment makes Bailey the fourth largest freight originating point on the Norfolk and Southern Railroad. Economically, the Bailey community is feeling the results of this increased stone output. Around 100 men are regularly employed, with local labor being used when possible. This adds approximately six-tenth of a million dollars to the area's economy annually.

A mortuary existed in Bailey for several years, but dissolved because of competition from surrounding towns. The town today maintains two auto dealerships. Several others have tried but were unable to maintain themselves as independent enterprises and went out of business. In 1947 a small wholesale business was opened in Bailey. By 1952, it had grown to be one of the largest in eastern North Carolina. This was quite a boost to the local economy, but in the mid or late fifties, this business merged with another company and re-located itself in a nearby city.

Bailey had a newspaper at one time, THE BAILEY NEWS. The first edition was published on May 2, 1952, Basically local in scope, the paper did include some state and national news. Because of competition from major newspapers of the area and lack of interest on the part of towns people, the endeavor was unsuccessful and the financier discontinued the publication after two years.

The first issue of THE BAILEY NEWS carried the headline, "Bailey Enters Finer Carolina Contest." This was perhaps one of the most creative efforts in the recent history of this rural town. In 1952 the Carolina Power and Light Company sponsored a campaign to the town of 1000 or less population doing the best job to build a "Finer Carolina". A \$1,000 prize was offered to the winning community. The purpose of this campaign was to improve the economy of the community and develop community pride. According to an article in the second edition of the weekly paper, there was much enthusiasm on the part of the townspeople for the program. Five months later many marked achievements in the area of educational institutions, streets and sidewalks, municipal utilities and public utilities were noted.

The Church has always been very important to the people of this community. Today, Bailey has four churches. All, as would

be expected, are Protestant. An accurate church history of the area is not available. Methodism can be traced back to the pre-revolutionary period when Pleasant Grove was established on the outskirts of the present Bailey Community. This church was the parent church of the present Methodist Church in Bailey as well as five other churches in adjacent communities. Further statements regarding the church history of the community can not be validated. The Baptist and Methodist have large, modern structures, and are rather urbanized so far as method, however they have not broken from the traditional orthodoxy which is the dominate thought throughout the South. The church is still important as a center for community interaction and fellowship. One can conclude the church is still the spiritual as well recreational heart of the community.

Civic life has for some years been an important part of the community. For many years there has been a Masonic Lodge in the town. In the early fifties, the Masons constructed a building for their own use and for the recreational use of the towns people. Other established civic organizations include the American Legion and Ladies Auxilliary, the Lions Club, the Eastern Star and Chamber of Commerce. In the past there was a Junior Order, but has now dissolved. Homemakers Clubs, and 4-H Clubs as a carryover the farms, have been strong organizations in the town for many years.

The town owns a Community Center which is available to the people of the area for a nominal fee. This is a tribute to the community action in the area. A Boy Scouts Troop is active in the town, offering an opportunity for creativity for the boys.

The town has a two man police department serving the community. The police are employed by the town. Social class is a definite aspect in the enforcement of city ordinances. If you belong to the "structure" you are relatively safe from police involvement. In a small town, the communication and extent one is known is a deterrent to lawlessness.

Bailey has a volunteer fire department which is a result of cooperative effort on the part of the citizens of Bailey and the surrounding area. Over the years, this volunteer action has saved the community millions of dollars annually in fire prevention and control. The department has expanded to include two trucks and two water carriers. When the fire department was established, insurance rates in the town were reduced by over 30%.

Another establishment for which Bailey is recognized is the location of Camp Charles, regional camp grounds for the Boy Scouts of America. This camp has brought many visitors into the town, But for all practical purposes the camp is of no economic importance to the town or community.

In 1929, a book club was organized in the town, the Virginia Dare Book Club. This organization is directly responsible for the establishment of a town library which is today, one of the outstanding libraries of a town of this size in the state. It has a circulation of several thousand volumes. The book Club has been responsible for bringing several programs to town. One which

received statewide Notation was a natural science exhibit several years ago. The book club has involved itself in the study of the cultural aspects of the community heritage.

During the 30's, Bailey and the surrounding community sponsored a community Fair. This was a gay occasion for the community as the farmers brought their farm products to the fair for judging and premiums. It was a festive occasion which celebrated the harvest season, the back bone of the community.

The town has had as established druggist and medical doctors since its beginning. Since the drugstore was built in 1915, there has been continuous availability of medical advice and perscription. In most cases, an individual who established as a doctor in Bailey has been very successful, drawing from both the town and rural areas.

The town of Bailey has been host to several leaders on both the national and international level. President Harry S. Truman made a visit to the city when he was in office. In 1954, Bailey was host to President and Madame Bayar, President of the Republic of Turkey, and the staff of approximately 35 aides and press representatives. At this time Bailey gained national attention. Today the people of the city reminisce the memories of the dignitary visits. After Bayar's visit, officials of the high school and the staff of the school paper were entertained at the Turkish Embassy in exchange for the hospitality afforded the president when he visited the town.

Today, Bailey is a status quo community, having changed very little over the past 10 years. It is in a situation where it must either progress or die. A great part of the towns population are elderly who have made their home here all their lives. The young people are leaving the town in search of opportunity in other areas. The larger towns of Wilson, Rocky Mount and Kaleigh are an economic drain on the town. The town has a large number of older ladies; widows or old ladies who never married. Actually the town is somewhat dominated by women. The postmaster, the only doctor in town and the town clerk, who in effect is town manager, are all ladies. The high rate of elderly people in residence tend to contribute to the maintenance of the status quo. They are reluctant to support progressive action proposed by the town government.

One can conclude that the automobile was the death of a one time thriving community. When transportation was by horse or wagon, the farmers of the area brought their commodities into Bailey for market. As transportation developed and each family had an auto or truck and the highways were developed to link the surrounding cities, farmers took their products to the other markets, thus the Bailey markets were forced out. Before the use of the automobile was widespread, there were 6 passenger trains stopping in Bailey daily. As the masses began using their private means of transportation, passenger service was forced out. This was quite an economic set back for the town. Now, the town is serviced by freight trains only. They are basically dependent on the Quarry production.

Bailey is a family town, There are families in the town which have been established as prominent since the town's beginning. There is definite class lines, stratified more by family than by education or income. It must be noted that the established families are for most part, those with more education and accumulation of wealth. Newcomers have difficulty in breaking the class lines, regardless of wealth of education. This is typical for the small, homogenous community as Bailey.

The Negro population is relatively small in contrast to what would be expected. This can be understood by noting the lack of opportunity in the town for employment of Negroes other than as domestic or seasonal labor. They must seek employment elsewhere.

With the exception of the merchants, the people living in town have farms on the outskirts of the community, work in adjacent cities as Wilson, Rocky Mount, and Raleigh or have established wealth or social security income and have retired. From observation, Bailey has a more than average number on individuals who are in the upper middle or lower upper class and have an established income without involving themselves in physical labor. The town has considerable wealth, but it is concentrated in limited number of families, basically the older people. The same people represent the chief power holders of the community.

What does the future promise for Bailey? One can only guess. There are several developments or proposals which can offer the needed stimulus reactivate this community.

The town is in the process of improving its public utilities. Last year saw improvements in the public water and sewer systems. The town has applied for an FHA loan to further develop water and sewer facilities to accommodate an eventual population of 20,000.

The number 20,000 is astounding, but reasonable. Two major highways within the next five years will intersect with Bailey as one of the nearest communities. Interstate 95 from New York to Florida will offer the Major coast, North-South route. As Highway 264, which is routed through the town, further develop in eastern North Carolina, this will be the eastern end of a transcontinental four-lane route which will be the major East-West route through North Carolina and will extend as it intersects with other major highways to provide a developed highway connecting the east and west coasts.

In the near future, as a federal project, a dam will be constructed on Contentnea Creek on Highway 264 six miles west of Bailey. This will provide an inexhaustable water supply which can support mass industry. It will also offer an area for inland recreation on a large scale as the lake formed by the dam will be a massive body of fresh water and in an excellent location with Raleigh, Wilson, Goldsboro, Greenville, Rocky Mount, Durham, and dozens of smaller towns being within an hours drive from the lake.

The area around Bailey is made up of small farms of a few dozen acres. Because of the necessity for mechanization and demands for commercial and corporate farms, the small farmer must either.

sell or lease his farm for large scale farming. Either way he is off the farm and being forced to seek employment. Within a six mile radius of the town there is a potential work force of more than 10,000 people, if properly trained. This would make industrial development in the area more appealing and it is necessary if this community is to survive as a town or concentrated population area.

At Rocky Mount, Fifteen miles away, a large modern airport is under construction to facilitate commercial airline traffic in Eastern North Carolina. This can serve to stimulate the community and encourage further development.

Many of the more progressive individuals of the area are aware of the unlimited possibilities so far as industry and tourism and are making creative moves to facilitate the eventual possibilities of this community.

By mid-summer of this year Bailey will be one of two cities in the United States to boast having a rural medical museum. The other is located in Danville, Kentucky. This exhibit alone can bring thousands of tourist into Bailey annually and boost the economy tremendously.

Others are thinking of developing the town and surrounding area as a "garden spot of the state" with emphasis on creative landscaping and beautifying available property. This would take thousands of dollars but it is not beyond the capabilities of the community if afforded proper leadership. As our urban areas are enlarging and the landscape becomes concrete and asphalt, tourism could again affect the economy as individuals get out of the city for a weekend vacation.

Today the town, governed by a mayor-council form of organization has the most effective and creative leadership in many years. A few years ago one could have written the eulogy for a dying town, as can be done for so many small rural service centers.

This community has been fortunate with the opportunities made available for its future development. If the leadership in the future is creative, progressive, responsible, and aggressive, Bailey can once again be a growing town. Its new birth can be that of an exploding industrial city, with the frustrations, problems, adventures, and challenges, of twentieth century urban American; not the complications, apathy, and disappointments of a dying rural Southern heritage. It has been written that the South is becoming more American with each new day. Just perhaps, Bailey can also????

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