

Those Days When We Picked Cotton  
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Going to the cotton field was not totally unpleasant. In fact it was mainly fun for some young folk. Picking cotton for them was fun, fun, fun. It was a time to be with cousins. A time to talk and to kid around. A time to go to the store and buy a lunch of baloney and crackers or cheese and crackers with a soft drink and perhaps a Hostess cupcake or a Moonpie for dessert.

Such was the experience of Bill Bailey who grew up on the farms owned by his grandparents, J. W. Bailey and Polly Winfield Bailey.

These two grandparents owned several hundred acres of farmland that they operated independently of each other. Mr. J. W. operated his farm and its tenants and Ms. Polly ran her farm and oversaw the tenants who lived on her land. Each of the Baileys raised a personal cotton crop that was mainly picked by hired hands, along with family members such as young Bill.

Unlike a lot of Haywood folk, the Bailey's very survival - whether they had enough food to eat, adequate clothes to keep warm, etc. - did not depend entirely on the outcome of the cotton crop. Consequently, their children and grandchildren were not inculcated with the seriousness of the harvest outcome. They were not desperate gamblers down to their last dollar.

The Baileys had an arrangement for getting hired hands into their fields. A neighbor had a school bus. They paid this neighbor twenty-five cents a head for each person he picked up in Brownsville and brought to their farms to pick cotton for the day.

Since schools were on a split session schedule, school children in town could spend from early September to mid November picking cotton for money. Some teachers also were among the hired hands, especially those able to easily pick 300 pounds per day. At that rate, if sustained, the teacher could make in a week of picking cotton just about what they earned in a week of teaching.

Memories of the cotton fields are still being sought from readers. Send your memories to GMHS at [dgrnbrry@aol.com](mailto:dgrnbrry@aol.com).