

Picking Cotton!!!

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If you are over 65 and was born and bred in Haywood County there is a mighty good chance that you have had a close and personal relationship with COTTON. For many who spent countless days pulling the fluffy white fibers from their brown husks with the often-sharp pointed ends this relationship is often less than something they pine to return to. They remember the punctured fingers, the pervasive smell of ripe cotton, spending all day toiling in the August and September suns.

The Geneva Miller Historical Society collects all kinds of memorabilia, not just material artifacts. The GMHS collects memories, folkways, beliefs, cooking techniques, stories, kinship patterns, etc. The GMHS would like readers to share stories about picking cotton.

To give you some ideas watch a video on YouTube called Picking Cotton. The video was put together by Art Fennell and his buddies around Bennettsville, SC. Fennell's YouTube channel is named Country Style. All of us who were cotton pickers, have stories from when we were actually picking the cotton and more recent ones that happened many years after we last walked from the cotton field.

One former local cotton picker who had picked cotton from the age of six until she left home at age 19, visited the home of a friend in a city where she had built a successful professional career. She was taken aback, almost shocked even, when she discovered the friend had decorated her living room with a floral arrangement that prominently featured open cotton bolls. The woman who had formerly picked cotton, was repulsed by the arrangement, and asked her friend what led her to include cotton as part of her home decor. The former cotton picker did not tell her friend about her negative feelings about the plant that was at the heart of the economy of the region where she had grown up.

GMHS would like to hear how you coped with stinging worms, what your family did when caught in the field by a sudden rainstorm, how your family kept cotton weights to determine when they had a bale to take to the gin. Then there is the ritual of taking the cotton to the gin - who took it, how long did it take, who among the children got a chance to go to the gin and into town, what goodies were bought with the seed check and brought back to the field from the gin.

There are a thousand cotton picking stories out there, share them with us before there are no longer any of us who picked the fluffy white fibers from their brown husks with the often sharp pointed ends and packed them into a six or nine foot canvas sack with plastic dots on the underside for traction and a cotton boll in one end of the bottom held in place by a piece of wire for putting the sack on the scale for weighing.