

Looking for Shakerag in Chatham Can You Help?

In 1912, Charles A. Farrell, a 19-year-old student at Wake Forest University wrote a story that was published in *The Wake Forest Student* about Thanksgiving in a community called "Shakerag," which he describes as originally being "along the little strip of road between Hank's Chapel and Moore's Mill." Later, he says "all the mountain for a mile on either side of the road from Doc Ellington's place to the ford goes under the name 'Shakerag'."

The story was brought to our attention by one of Charles Farrell's descendants, Mr. Charles Plambeck, who is pretty sure that the references in the story are to real people and places in Chatham County. He believes that the characters in the story lived in the period between about 1898 and 1912. The story's author, Charles Farrell, was born in 1893 and attended the Farrell reunions at Hanks Chapel throughout his life.

Mr. Plambeck has made an effort to identify as many of the people in the story as he can in the following annotated transcription of the article. For example, the story mentions Uncle Hiram Bland, who was in fact Charles A. Farrell's great-uncle. Mr. Plambeck is seeking help from anyone who might be familiar with a community that was called "Shakerag," or one called "Dogtrot" in Chatham – or with the Hank's Chapel area, even if these names were not used. Information about any of the people mentioned in the story would also be appreciated.

If you can help with locations or possible identification of any of the persons mentioned in the story, please message us at history@chathamhistory.org.

It is likely, of course, that the story draws on real people and places but fictionalizes them, but if real Chatham County people are the basis for Mr. Farrell's story it would be interesting to identify them. At the very least, Mr. Farrell uses a lot of Chatham County names! Mr. Plambeck speculates in the footnotes about who some of these people might be. If you have other guesses or information, please let us know.

Meanwhile, enjoy Mr. Farrell's story on the following pages, which, when read with historical Chatham County in mind becomes a kind of mystery!



This excerpt from Ramsey's 1870 map shows the area around Moore's Mill on the Haw River.

Here's a [link to the original manuscript](#) which also includes a poem by Charles A. Farrell, written in dialect.

THANKSGIVING ON SHAKERAG ¹

CHAS. A. FARRELL²

Originally the Shakerag settlement extended merely along the little strip of road between Hank's Chapel and Moore's Mill.³ But of late years all the mountain⁴ for a mile on either side of the road from Doc Ellington's⁵ place to the ford goes under the name "Shakerag." However, the river⁶ has always been the extreme northern boundary of Shakerag. For, as the old saying goes, "ha'r sho is boun' to fly when a Shakerag man an' a Dogtrot⁷ man tries to hunt gals or turkey together."

Thanksgiving Day has ever been a great occasion on Shakerag; and as old Uncle Hiram Bland⁸ used to say: "They allus will be ez long as the younkens⁹ stay to home an' the railroad stays on t'other side o' Bull Mountain."¹⁰

Several autumns have rolled around since old Uncle Hiram passed away;¹¹ and Thanksgiving has come again to gladden the hearts of the Shakerag folk. And this time, so the Shakerag coquette, saucy Daisy Moore,¹² confided to me, "they's gona be a celebration right." "An' 'fore the dancin' at Uncle Walt's¹³ is over they's gona be some fun," she concluded with a devilish giggle.

The day dawned clear; and the air was crisp. By eight o'clock the wagons were lumbering by Sis Boone's¹⁴ cabin. Thanksgiving festivities always began at the old campground down on Uncle Hiram's place. Uncle Billy Boone,¹⁵ occupying his spring wagon alone and taxing his little white mule's strength to its utmost, was first in order to rattle by. In one hand he held his snuffbox; while from his mouth protruded a long black-gum tooth-brush. Uncle Billy weighed 300 pounds; and was recognized as master of ceremonies. Next came Dolph Saunders¹⁶ and his crowd —

¹ The Wake Forest Student, Vol XXXII, No. 2, November, 1912

² Farrell was 19 when he wrote this.

³ See Map

⁴ What mountain?

⁵ Probably Walter Alvin Ellington, nicknamed "Doc," born 28 Oct 1846, died 14 Feb 1927, buried in Hank's Chapel

⁶ Haw River, but it runs mostly north-south at that point, so not clear it could form a northern boundary

⁷ Suggests "Dogtrot" is on the other side of the river

⁸ Hiram Bland was in fact C.A. Farrell's great uncle

⁹ He uses this term in his mountain dialects also, so wonder whether it is correct

¹⁰ Not sure Bull Mountain is a real place. The railroad is south

¹¹ This is accurate. Hiram passed away sometime after 1900

¹² From Moore's Mill? Could it be his cousin Daisy Farrell, 10 years older than he, daughter of Seaborn Farrell, who was Younger Farrell's brother (so actually first cousins once removed)? Sanders, Daisy Farrell (b. 12 Apr 1883 - d. 21 Dec 1957) Wife of L. H. Sanders. "One who trusted God and loved her friends". Row 23.

¹³ Could "Uncle Walt" be "Doc Ellington"?

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¹⁵ Boone, William Womble, Jr. (b. Unknown - d. 26 Nov 1954). Son of William Womble, Sr. and Barbara Holt Boone. Flat. Location row 10. Or possibly William Jaesph Boone.

¹⁶ Saunders seems to have morphed to Sanders in the records. "Dolph" is possibly "Adolphus." The 1920 census lists Adophus Farrell as the head of household with four of his sisters, including Daisy Farrell. The 1910 census has

“Sal and seven younkers.” Thus they passed until fully a dozen wagons, filled with the older men, the women and children, and the buxom girls, had rattled by.

At Thanksgiving time every man understood his part. Long hours ago Don White¹⁷ and Cap Saunders¹⁸ were lying in Lon’s¹⁹ turkey blind. Skip Boone²⁰ and Koot Saunders²¹ were scouring the woods for squirrel. From over ’cross the creek came the baying of Haz Hackney’s²² hounds. And although it was late in the season Doc Ellington²³ was paying his fish traps down on Robeson²⁴ a visit. Bug White²⁵ was off to cut one of his bee trees;²⁶ while some of the other boys went by Uncle Walt’s²⁷ to “fetch down a couple o’ shoats.” Jim Boone²⁸ had grumblingly agreed to look after the beverages for the day’s jollity.

“Aw g’wan, Jim,” laughed Aunt Sis, “that Daisy Moore won’t spile ’fore you git thar.” Jim scowled and we drove off. He was in a sour humor. Rumors had reached him “as how Daisy had been trapsin round with that houn’ frum Dogtrot.”

“An’ jes’ last night she was a-tellin’ of me how slam handsome he wuz,” Jim confided to me. Then he straightened as an idea seemed to strike him: “Wonder if that dog will dar’ come over to-day ; if t’want Thanksgivin’ I’d go right now and wring his bloomin’ gizzard.” And the handsome giant at my side ground his teeth in a way that boded evil.

What a sight the camp was when Jim and I drove up about ten o’clock! Already the fires were roaring along the face of a great cliff. Sundry kinds of game brought in by the stragglers hung over the hot coals by means of wires suspended from green saplings fixed for the purpose. Uncle Mose Williams, an old darkey celebrated for his barbecue, was mumbling over the spits on which lay a white pig. Presiding over the preparations. Uncle Billy, seated in his great double chair, was giving orders and plying his tooth brush.

Adolphus with his mother and five sisters. Not clear if this ties with “Sal” presumably Sally or Sarah. Perhaps Sarah White, who is with “Dolphus” in the 1860 census.

¹⁷ Could this be White, D. B. (b. 8 Jan 1860 - d. 10 Feb 1940) Husband of Mary Candis White. "A Faithful Father". Double headstone. Footstone: Father. Row 8. In the 1900 census he is “Doctor” B. White, even though he is a farmer.

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¹⁹ Cooper, Lonnie C. (b. 6 Mar 1890 - d. 7 Mar 1960) Husband of Lillie S. Cooper. Double headstone. Footstone: Father. Location row 16. Or Lonnie White, born 1907?

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²⁴ Robeson Creek

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²⁸ Boone, J. W. (b. 5 Jul 1853 - d. 1 Nov 1936) Husband of Julia Boone. 3' pedestal. Location row 27.

The winsome Daisy Moore was barbecuing a hare. Over the hot coals “Brer Babbit” had become a dark red color. From his body there dripped a mixture of butter, vinegar, pepper and salt, which the girl was putting on with a barbecue mop, as she turned the hare from side to side. Young Boone shuffled around awkwardly as if to help her and slammed his foot into the sauce pan.

“Jes’ you git away frum here, Jim Boone, you meddler,” the girl hurled at the unfortunate boy. The Shakerag giant slunk away abashed.

“Some o’ the Dogtrot boys is coming over this evening; and you jes’ watch; that stuck up Jim Boone’s gona be hoppin’ mad. He thinks he owns Shakerag now,” the pretty little mischief maker giggled. The Shakerag beauty was anticipating something romantic. She was in high good humor.

The feast was spread on rough tables built from tree to tree. Uncle Billy asked a simple blessing. And what a feast it was! barbecued pig and game; ’taters roasted in the hot ashes; “punkin” pies; all the fruits of the autumn. The “beverage” was a great keg of “cimmon and locust beer”²⁹ served out in gourd dippers. The men might take a little finger of whiskey later.

No petted appetities did these people show. They ate heartily and joyously of everything placed before them. Rough but original wit flew from side to side.

“There be some rumor as how Sam Black³⁰ from over Dogtrot way is layin’ in your turkey blind these days, Jim,” remarked a girl. The others giggled, the boys winked, and the Shakerag beauty cast a saucy glance at the Shakerag hero.

A retort was on Jim’s lips; but at this moment up drove the dashing young man from Dogtrot with three companions. The new arrivals were given a hearty welcome, first by Uncle Billy and the older folk, then by the younger. It was a law of the section that on such occasions as Thanksgiving nothing but courtesy must abound. Only young Boone scowled when his sweetheart tripped up with both hands outstretched to greet the Dogtrot man.

The great dinner finished, the older folk betook themselves to the fires and to their snuff; the small boys chased away through the woods; the young folks strolled off in little groups. Daisy Moore had given her arm to Sam Black. Jim was left to come along with gentle little brown-eyed Susan Baker.³¹ If Jim had noticed, he would have seen that the brown eyes were troubled.

Soon the young folks were making the welkin ring³² as they played “drop handkerchief,” “tap,” and other vigorous games in a glade. Jim’s eyes followed hungrily every movement of the nimble-footed Daisy. He ground his teeth when the Dogtrot man gave Daisy Moore a vigorous kiss on her rosy cheek – the penalty when a girl was caught at “tap.”

²⁹ Persimmon and locust beer

³⁰ Not clear if “Sam Black” from Dogtrot is a real person

³¹ Four people with Baker surnames are buried in Hanks Chapel.

³² What is this?

“It’s a shame the way Daisy and Sam’s cuttin’ up,” whispered the brown-eyed one at Jim’s side. Even yet the sulky giant had not seen how sadly his partner watched the Dogtrot man.

Only too soon the sun began to sink and the folk to prepare for home. “Tired out and ready for bed,” you think. Not so with these vigorous people. The merry-making at the old campground was but preliminary to the great Thanksgiving event – the corn-shucking and the dance at Uncle Walt’s.

A bright hunter’s moon shone down on the scene in Uncle Walt’s barnyard. Seated on piles of shucks, the men and boys were steadily digging holes toward the center of a great pile of yellow corn. Uncle Walt had passed around something that but inspired the men to great effort.

At last the race in on between young Boone and the Dogtrot man. Each husks corn furiously. But a few minutes remain now till one will find the prize. Sam Black, with a howl of delight, suddenly draws forth a great demijohn. He has scored another victory over his rival, who is now pale with anger.

“D--- your,” young Boone is about to explode. But at this moment Aunt Molly calls from the porch. There is a rush for the dining room. Uncle Walt pats the boy on the back and for the present everything is all right.

In the dining-room a true shucking banquet is spread – turkey and ’possum, and pumpkin pie, and more beer. Young Boone has sulked away and is nursing his wrath with a great jug out in the back yard. Through a window he can see his rival in triumph being served by the Shakerag beauty.

“I’d give a hoss to git that houn’ out back o’ the stable,” he grumbles. Uncle Walt is trying to calm him.

“’Member, Jim, we’s gotta treat the skunk nice to-day; jes’ you wait; sompin’ll happen when the las’ dance comes. That gal Daisy knows what she be a-doin’.”

Soon the great dining-room is cleared. Uncle Walt and Hen Boone³³ and Haz Hackney,³⁴ the best fiddles and banjo on all Shakerag, are tuning their instruments. Haz strums in a manner that makes feet restless.

“Choose your partners; promenade all!” calls Will Moore as the musicians strike up “Arkansaw Traveler,” Daisy Moore and Sam Black are promenading together.

Then follows an indescribable evening. The musicians are doing their utmost. Dance after dance follows in rapid succession. The room rings with the tread of feet in perfect time; round and round the dancers swing and turn and promenade. Will Moore shouts the figures with spirit. The

³³ Maybe Boone, Henry B. (b. 15 Jan 1882 - d. 7 Nov 1938) Location row 14.

³⁴ Maybe Henry Harrison ‘Hess’ Hackney born 1890 died 1969. Harrison Hackney was a grandson of Hiram Bland, living with him at the time of the 1900 census.

older folk are looking in from the doorways. Not once does Jim's sweetheart leave the Dogtrot man's side. The giant is convulsed with mortification and anger. The girl is bewitchingly saucy.

The time for the last dance has come. The girls are to choose their favorites, who shall see them home. The musicians strike up "Flop-Eared Mule." The girls begin shuffling their feet toward the young men who are lined up against the wall. Everybody is on tiptoe with expectancy. Uncle Billy, filling an entire doorway, utters a guffaw. Straight to where young Boone and Black are standing side, Daisy Moore dances. Devilment shines in her eyes, she hesitates, swaying in perfect time with the music. She bends toward her sweetheart; his face brightens. Then smiling she turns to the Dogtrot man. The Shakerag hero has lost. Bang! A hard, bony fist lands on Black's nose. He falls like lead, but is instantly up, a murderous looking revolver in his hand. Everyone stands horror-struck. Black's jaws snap to and the revolver comes to level. At this moment a little brown-eyed girl springs from the crowd and grabs the revolver hand. Immediately the room is in confusion.

"Oh, Sam!" Susan screams as she grapples him around the neck.

"Wal! wal! wal! the likes o' this come off," Uncle Billy waddles excitedly through the doorway.

By the time the confusion at the house is over, by a little Shakerag branch, Susan is bathing a bloody nose with her handkerchief.

Now you see, Sam, what comes o'meddlin' with that frisky Daisy Moore," she scolds.

In a buggy speeding toward home, the thoroughly penitent Shakerag beauty is weeping on her giant's shoulder.

"Anyhow, Jim, I wuz jest a-teasin'; an' if you hed only a-waited --." The rest is smothered out by – the noise of horse and buggy.

__ THE END __