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Some Means of Livelihood in Chatham County around 1850

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In 1850, Chatham County was a rural and agricultural area. Pittsboro, the county seat, was the only important town, with a population estimated to be not over 300 inhabitants. The total population of Chatham County was 18,449.

The U.S. census of 1850 was the first to list household members by name, sex, and age, instead of summarizing by age and gender.¹ The one-page census schedule also included columns headed, "Profession, occupation, or trade of each male person over 15 years of age," value of real estate owned, place of birth, and other information. This article is based on information from the column describing profession or occupation.

By far the most numerous occupation entered under this column heading was "Farmer," with 1434 entries. The next most numerous occupation listed was "Laborer," with a total of 521 entries. Many of this group were probably the young sons of farmers still living at home and working for their fathers on the family farm. Others, ranging in age up to 70 years, worked as day laborers for various employers.

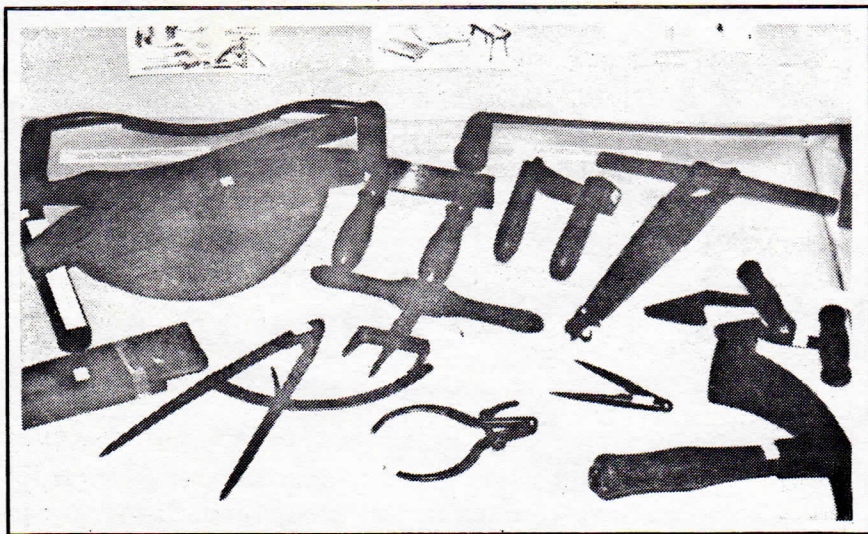
Besides farmer and laborer, 58 occupations were listed, with 465 people engaged in them. Manual occupations, including artisans, are prominent. Mechanized activity was present mainly at grist mills, sawmills, and cotton gins.

Not included in the census are the occupational activities of women, the slave population, and people under 15 years of age. Home industry, including spinning, knitting, and weaving, was common and important at this time.

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In alphabetical order, with definitions and the author's comments, the occupations listed in the 1850 census follow.

- Blacksmith, 39
- Bricklayer, 1
- Butcher, 1
- Cabinetmaker, 9
- Carpenter, 32
- Carriage maker, 3
- Chair maker, 2
- Clerk, 10
- Constable, 5
- Cooper (a maker or repairer of barrels or casks), 14
- County Registrar, 1
- County Surveyor, 2
- Dentist, 4
- Deputy sheriff, 2
- Distiller, 2
- Ditcher, 1
- Groom, 2
- Gunsmith, 3
- Hatter (one who makes or sells hats), 10
- Horse trader, 1
- Hotel keeper, 1
- Lawyer, 8
- Machinist (one skilled in the use of machine tools; or one who constructs machines or engines; or one who works or runs a machine), 3
- Mason, 1
- Mechanic (a workman skilled in constructing, repairing, or using machinery), 38
- Medical student, 2
- Merchant, 32
- Miller, 22
- Millwright, 11
- Navy, 1 (This entry was made by Captain William E. Boudinot, who was with the U.S. Navy in 1850.)
- Overseer, 23 (During the antebellum period, this term frequently denoted a supervisor of the slaves at a farm or plantation.)



In May 1993, Thomas L. "Snuffy" Smith and Robert Weisner, CCHA Historian, organized a display of old tools at the Chatham County Historical Museum in the Chatham County Courthouse, Pittsboro. Called "How Chatham Worked," the display featured tools made or used in Chatham County, from Smith's private collection.

Pauper, 1
 Peddler, 11
 Physician, 20
 Planter, 2
 Pomologist (a practitioner of pomology, the science and practice of fruit growing), 2
 (Thomas and Joshua Lindley, Jr. listed pomologist as their profession. The *Hillsboro Record* of December 20, 1848 carried this advertisement: "Fruit trees for sale by J. and T. Lindley at Cane Creek, Chatham County.")
 Poorhouse keeper, 1
 (Eleven residents are listed: three black and eight white; seven men and four women. Ages ranged from 24 to 88 years.)
 Potter, 6
 Preacher, 15
 Printer, 1
 Rock mason, 2
 Saddler (a maker, repairer, or seller of saddles or other equipment for horses), 9
 Schoolmaster, 1
 School teacher, 8
 Sheriff, 1
 Shingle maker, 1
 Shoemaker, 35
 Silversmith, 1
 Stage driver, 3
 Stone mason, 3
 Student, 1
 Tailor, 15
 Tanner (one whose occupation is to tan hides), 1
 Teacher, 20
 Twenty individuals listed their occupation as teacher. Most or possibly all were school teachers [listed above], which indicates a total of 28 for this profession.)
 Trader, 1

Wagoner, 2
 Wagon maker, 3
 Wheelwright (one whose occupation is to make or repair wheels and wheeled vehicles), 15

NOTES

1. 1850 U.S. Census, Chatham County, North Carolina, John F. Schunk, ed. (Wichita, Kansas: S-K Publications, 1986)

Morningsville: An Early Chatham Community

Ernest A. Dollar, Jr.*

The Morningsville community no longer shows any sign of its earlier existence, but during its hundred-year history it played an active role in North Carolina's economic, social, and military affairs. The name of the hamlet came from the family who owned the land in which the village was located.

Morningsville was a small town in the most northeastern part of Chatham County, in Williams township. It shows up for the first time on the 1833 MacRae-Brazier map of North Carolina, labeled "Mooring's." It next can be seen on the Colton 1861 map and the Coast Survey map of 1865.¹ Its final appearances are on Capt. N. A. Ramsey's 1870 map of Chatham County, and the 1886 Shaffer's township map. On a 1943 postal route map, the area is known simply as "Moring."²

The first Moring in the area was Sgt. John Moring, Jr., who moved from Surry County, Virgin-

Ernest Dollar, Jr., lives in Durham. A 1993 graduate of UNC-Greensboro, he has a longstanding interest in Civil War history, especially in North Carolina. He plans to continue the study of history in graduate school.

ia, in 1824 with his ten-year-old son Alfred. John Moring was a veteran of the Revolutionary War, having enlisted as a teenager in the Third Virginia Regiment of the Continental army.³ John Moring came to North Carolina in 1805 and purchased land where Moringsville would later be.⁴ He returned to Virginia and moved back to North Carolina in 1824. After his return, John Moring and later his son, Alfred, were very successful in business, owning and operating the stage line along the "two-day road" between the expanding town of Chapel Hill and the new state capital of Raleigh.⁵

The Morings had the government contract for carrying the mail and were required to meet a travel schedule of eight miles per hour. The stagecoach drivers were paid generously, one hundred twenty-five dollars per month, but a \$10,000 bond was required for each driver.⁶

Morningsville served as the post office for the region from 1831 to 1883.⁷ James M. Moring was appointed as the first postmaster on March 18, 1831. Mail carriages passed through Chapel Hill only once per week in 1795, but by the late 1820s the public stagecoach, which was a two-horse carriage, came through every day.⁸ The Morings started the "Double Daily Service," which meant that they sent one coach in each direction, toward Raleigh and Chapel Hill, daily.⁹

Oral tradition tells of two locations on the road that passed by Moring's tavern and stage stop, one a half-mile to the southeast toward Raleigh and the other a half-mile northwest on the Chapel Hill side. From these points, a bugle was sounded to correspond to the number of stage passengers. This was done in order to give the hosts time to prepare meals and fresh horses. This was common practice at stage stops in the nineteenth century.

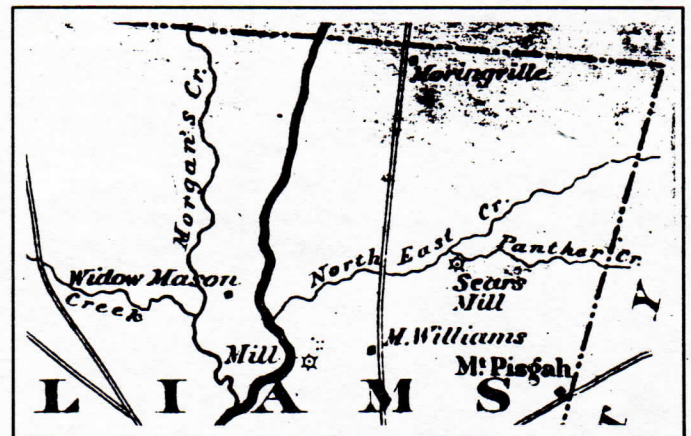
The Moring station comprised two structures, an outside kitchen and a main "big house" where the family and guests stayed.¹⁰ When the family had no guests, they usually ate in the outside kitchen but moved food into the house to serve patrons. Most houses of the day had kitchens away from the main house. This was to insure that if a fire started in the kitchen it would not spread and destroy the living quarters. Artifacts from this area consist of broken pottery, coins, and evidence of a blacksmith's shop. The present owners of the land remember massive sycamore and walnut trees in the immediate area of the house site. These trees were sold for lumber in the 1920s. The driveway of the present-day house, which stands adjacent to the Moring site, is part of the original stage road leading to Chapel Hill. The steep earthen walls of the path are evidence of years of usage.

Morningsville, being a prominent stop on the road, played host to many important persons who traveled between the capital of Raleigh and the university in Chapel Hill. One important visitor was President James K. Polk. After Polk's inauguration as president in March of 1845, the trustees of the university voted to grant him and his Secretary of the Navy, John Young Madison, an 1816 graduate of the University of North Carolina, honorary degrees, which were given *in absentia* in June. Two years later, Polk accepted an invitation from university president Swain to attend the commencement of 1847. President Polk left a detailed account of his visit in his diary.¹¹ Accompanied by Mrs. Polk, her niece, Secretary Mason, and others, Polk left Raleigh at 9 a.m. on Monday, 31 May 1847, stopped for lunch at Moring's tavern, and reached Chapel Hill about 6 p.m. On his return trip he left Chapel Hill about 6 p.m., arriving at Moring's tavern at 8 p.m., and departed for Raleigh at 2 a.m. in order to meet his train for Washington.

The Morings also shared the community spotlight with one of their famous relatives, the Rev. James O'Kelly, who lived in this area. O'Kelly was the Methodist minister who broke away from Methodism, forming the first Christian Church in North Carolina.¹² Morningsville was the site of this first church, which is marked by a historical marker.

On December 5, 1867, the Manuel Fetter Lodge No. 275 was organized. Men from the Morningsville community joined this Masonic lodge, which was constructed on land purchased by Masonic representative W. H. Weatherspoon from Alfred Moring and his wife Elizabeth.¹³ One of the lodge's most respected masters was Richard Watts York. York was the principal of the Cedar Forks Academy, located in the nearby Nelson area in southern Durham County. When the War Between the States broke out, York was commissioned as a captain of a company called the "Cedar Forks Rifles," or the "North Carolina Grays." The company was officially

Portion of Capt. Ramsey's 1870 map of Chatham County.



designated as Company I of the 6th North Carolina State Troops and comprised men from western Wake County and neighbors from Chatham County, including volunteers from Morningsville.¹⁴

Four years after the company was formed, in April 1865, the war would find the small hamlet. The Confederate army under General Joseph E. Johnston was being pursued by the Union army under General William T. Sherman. One wing of the retreating Confederate army passed through Morningsville heading to Chapel Hill. The rearguard for Johnston's infantry was formed by Confederate cavalry under General Joseph Wheeler. The rebels camped in the western outskirts of the village on April 13 and skirmished lightly on the 14th. On April 15, two miles west of the hamlet, the pursuing Federal troops under General Smith D. Atkins engaged some of Wheeler's men across New Hope Creek.¹⁵

Today there are no scars of the battle to be seen and nothing left of the Moring tavern. The only visible remnant is the family cemetery, where the graves of Alfred and his family rest in a patch of young pines. Some graves have headstones that reveal the owners of the land. Others buried there are unknown, the graves marked with rocks as simple memorials. A separate graveyard, about 100 yards from the Moring cemetery, holds several more graves, some marked with rocks and others unmarked. These are thought to be the final resting place of the Moring family slaves.

The community of Morningsville seems to be very removed from the busy thoroughfares of Pittsboro and Siler City, but in the 19th century this small hamlet was on the main road and was a part of many events that shaped North Carolina. This road, which brought the Morings to the rural part of Chatham, would help them earn their living. This road brought statesmen, presidents, and clergymen to the area. Men from the community marched off to war down this road, and war was brought back to the residents down this same path. But once this road was made obsolete by the railroad, their lifeline was cut off, and Morningsville was destined to fade into history.

NOTES

1. The MacRae-Brazier map of 1833, Colton map of 1861, and coast survey map of 1865 have been reproduced in William P. Cumming, *North Carolina in Maps* (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1966).

2. The 1870 Ramsey map has recently been reprinted by the Chatham County Historical Association; Shaffer's Township Map of North Carolina (Raleigh: A.W. Shaffer, 1886) may be seen at the North Carolina Archives.

3. William Moring Porter, "A Genealogical Study and Stories of the Moring, Nicholas, Thorns and Coffin Families of Asheboro, N.C." (n.p.: Porter, 1991); Annie Moring Robbins papers filed with Randolph County Genealogical Society, Asheboro, North Carolina.

4. Chatham County Register of Deeds, Book O, p. 93-94. Moring is identified as a resident of Chatham County in a purchase of 536 acres of land on the Northeast Prong of New Hope Creek, on both sides of the road from the university to Raleigh, including "woods, waters, mill, and houses."

5. Robert Hughes, "History Lost with Tombstones," *Chatham Record*, 2 March 1989, reprinted in the Chatham County Historical Association *Newsletter*, March 1989. By stage, the distance between Chapel Hill and Raleigh is roughly 29 miles, with Morningsville about 12 miles from Chapel Hill.

6. "Mr. A. Moring Died in His Ninetieth Year," *The Morning Post*, Raleigh, N.C., 12 May 1903.

7. G.P. Stout, "Chatham County, N. C.: Historical Research Map" (Greensboro: G.P. Stout, 1974).

8. James Vickers, *Chapel Hill: An Illustrated History* (Chapel Hill: Barclay, 1985).

9. "Mr. A. Moring..."

10. Edwin and Leon Booth, interview by author, October 1993 (current owners of Moring family land, residents in area since the 1920s).

11. *The Diary of James K. Polk during his Presidency, 1845-1849* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1910; New York: Kraus Reprint, 1970), Vol. III, p. 44, 48-49.

12. Charles F. Kilgore, *The James O'Kelly Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Mexico D.F., Mexico: Casa Unida de Publicaciones, 1963).

13. Wade H. Hadley, Doris G. Horton, and Nell C. Strowd, *Chatham County, 1771-1971* (Pittsboro, N.C.: Chatham County Historical Association, 1992), p. 312.

14. Elizabeth Reid Murray, *Wake: Capital County of North Carolina* (Raleigh: Capital Publishing Co., 1983), p. 471; Weymouth T. Jordan, Jr., comp., *North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865* (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, 1973), Vol. 4, p. 368.

15. John G. Barrett, *Sherman's March Through the Carolinas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), p. 257-258; Cornelia Phillips Spencer *Papers, 1864-1930*, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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