

Mattie Rogers Beavers ~ Rural Mail Carrier

The following is the transcribed text of an article about Mattie Rogers Beavers that appeared in the *Greensboro Daily News* on 22 July 1928. Transcription provided by Milli Hammer, granddaughter of Mattie Rogers Beavers, whose career as a rural mail carrier is described in the article. Mrs. Hammer also supplied the accompanying photographs and biographical sketch.

Chatham County Lays Claim to Only Woman Rural Mail Carrier Who Clings to Horse and Buggy

LONG SERVICE

Few Days Experience with Auto Sufficient to Reinstate Old Dobbin

SUREST WAY OF TRAVEL

By - Marie Gregson Cooper*

Siler City, July 21, 1928 – Probably the only woman rural mail carrier in the United States who has not replaced her horse and buggy with the more modern motor car, Mrs. George Beavers, carrier on route 3 out of Siler City has been on the job for 21 years.

Here's Mrs. Beavers and Her Turnout



It didn't take the Chatham lady but a short time to discard automobile and reinstate faithful horse.

Since February 4, 1907, Mrs. Beavers has given her untiring efforts as mail carrier on route three. During that time she has established a record that few in her profession can challenge. She holds the distinction of carrying the mail longer than any woman in North Carolina who is in service today.

This month for the first time in 21 years, the housewives of route three looked out their kitchen window and failed to see Mrs. Beavers driving her one horse shay past their mail boxes. They had decided that some terrible calamity had befallen her when, lo, instead of her faithful Dobbin, someone in a trim coupe was delivering the mail. On closer observation it was discovered that this mail carrier was none other than their beloved Mrs. Beavers.

Strong for Buggy

When asked if she had decided at last to yield to the fashions of progress and change her mode of transportation, a twinkle came in her merry eyes and she said:

"For two or three days I have been using a car but since there has been so much rain I am using my horse and buggy again. It is the surest way of transportation."

And, indeed, it is because this route of hers is no Lincoln Highway. It is a rugged country road winding in and out over the red hills of Chatham.

Beloved by People

Mrs. Beavers has the privilege of getting closer to human nature than most of us.

“We are just like one big family out on route three,” she says.

In the winter when the thermometer is registering its lowest, the trip would seem almost unendurable were it not for the kind friends along the road who welcome her with steaming hot coffee and appetizing food to cheer her on her way. Fried chicken dinners are sometimes served her and, in summer, all kinds of the choicest vegetables and fruits of the country are at her command.

Mrs. Beavers is not looked upon as merely the mail carrier, but as a friend with whom to share confidences, joys and sorrows. The things she is called upon to do runs all the way from matching a sample of calico to naming the newest baby.

Defied Weather

Only twice since she has been carrying the mail has Mrs. Beavers failed to make the return trip to the Siler City Post Office. She drove for miles with her horse trudging through snow drifts that were frozen over with a heavy crust of ice. The wind and snow blew steadily in her face until it became so blinding that she was afraid she would lose her course and would perish by the wayside. So she was forced to spend the night at some farm house that welcomed her in. Each time her horse had to be kept in a stable for a week afterwards because its feet were so badly cut by the ice.

Crosses Flooded Stream

A number of times Mrs. Beavers has been forced to ford Love's Creek when her horse had to swim. The water came up over the foot of the buggy and she had to put her feet on the dash board to keep them from getting wet. It is no pleasant experience to ford a stream in the summer in the good old summer time when possibly there has been a fresh rain up the creek to cause it to overflow its banks. But in the winter when it has been raining for days to brave the icy water that comes surging down the stream takes courage and presence of mind that Mrs. Beavers has demonstrated that she has. In recent years, she has not had this erstwhile unruly stream to combat as the ford has been spanned by a modern bridge.

Twice during the time she has been employed by the postal service the waters of this stream have been so high he could not drive through. But determined to carry through her mission she walked through mud and mire shoe-top deep to the tracks of the A and Y railroad, where walking was not so difficult and completed her journey to the Siler City post office. She reached there tired and worn but with the satisfaction of having accomplished her duty.

Narrowly Escapes Drowning

This hazardous part of her work has caused Mrs. Beavers no little anxiety. Once she had a narrow escape from drowning in Love's Creek. This is her story of the exciting experience.

“It was raining but I did not think the water of the stream had risen very high. When I drove into the stream I became aware that the water was higher than I'd thought. My horse was naturally shy of water and began jumping and plunging about. He became so unruly that I could not control him. Almost any instant I thought he might fall and turn the buggy over. I don't know how long this lasted but it seemed an eternity. Finally the harness broke and my horse rushed out of the stream leaving

me forlorn and miserable with my buggy sitting out in the creek and with nothing to break the ghastly silence save the lapping of the muddy waves against the buggy”.

“I knew that something had to be done immediately, as the swift current was about to overturn the buggy and leave me at the mercy of the yellow water which I had no hope of ever escaping alive. There was no other escape for me than to jump to the bank of the stream. I threw my mail out on the bank first. Not daring to think what would happen if I made a false step, I climbed out onto the wheel of the buggy, steadied myself and made one wild lunge and landed on land. Yes, in the middle of a puddle. At that time, in the joy of feeling the land under my feet again, it seemed the dearest spot on earth. I sustained no injuries other than a bad case of shattered nerves and a thorough coat of red mud”.

Lover of Horses

Mrs. Beavers is a great lover of horses and she is very careful in selecting them. One time, she tells us, she tried 25 horses before selecting one that could meet her rigid requirements. She is a good judge of horses. But one time she placed too much confidence in her steed.

“I had been using this horse for about a year. He seemed to be perfectly gentle and I became careless. Once as I drove up to a mail box I dropped the lines over the dash board and just as I started to open my mail bag, a boy driving a white mule drove up under the shade of a nearby cedar tree to wait for his mail. As he stopped my horse became frightened and before I could recover the lines or had time to surmise what had happened we were dashing down the road and I was powerless to stop him. I can’t remember what prompted me to do it but I leaped out of the mail wagon window. When I recovered enough from the shock to collect myself I found I didn’t so much as have a scratch, a thing that seemed almost a miracle. I do not know how to explain it. I guess the good Lord was taking care of me. The mail wagon was completely demolished. Almost immediately almost all the neighborhood farmers and their wives arrived on the scene. The women came with camphor bottles and bandages. There were few telephones in those days, and I can’t imagine how they got the news so quick. But news travels fast in rural districts”.

“This experience did not detain me for long. One of the neighbors loaned me a horse and buggy and I was soon on my way again not with as much poise, perhaps, but thankful that what might have proven to be a tragic accident had been averted.

Observed Human Nature

Mrs. Beavers had a chance to observe many of the homely little ramifications of human nature. There have been sweethearts waiting impatiently for their love letters and mothers waiting patiently and proudly for news from their sons and daughters who were away at college. There have been disappointed mothers and fathers when the letters did not come.

The children out on route three are great pals of Mrs. Beavers. They are always eagerly awaiting mail from some unknown point, and Mrs. Beavers, rather than disappoint them she always gives them a scrap of paper or some whatnot. At Christmas time she is always in great demand to carry the Santa Claus letters, and she always pays special attention to the instructions that are given to insure the letters reaching old Saint Nick himself.

Frightened One Time

Mrs. Beavers was asked if anyone had ever frightened her during her long rides through the country.

“No, not many” she answered. “I believe the worst that I was ever scared, and that did not amount to much, was about one month after I started carrying the mail. I was driving over a desolate stretch of road when suddenly I saw a man running down the hill with a knife in his hand, which of

course looked three times as big as it really was. I didn't know whether he was going to behead me or not. But I kept driving towards him, thinking that if I had any mail for him I would have to stop. But much to my relief when I came closer to him I recognized him as a friend of my father who only wanted to speak to me. But, as yet, I do not know the purpose for that gleaming knife. I don't suppose that he was even conscious of carrying it".

Her Daily Schedule

Mrs. Beavers rises at 5 o'clock every morning. After washing the breakfast dishes and tidying up the house, she goes out on her route. Her schedule was formerly from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. but recently it was changed to the more favorable hours of 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Then too, the roads are much improved to those of the earlier years, according to Mrs. Beavers, who adds that her mail route is, in comparison to the earlier routes of this district, better where the roads are good and worse in the bad places.

When Mrs. Beavers completes her route of 30 miles, she drives two miles to her home west of Siler City where she has reared four children. All of these are now grown. She has five grandchildren. From her appearance one would never guess that Mrs. Beavers is 62 years old, as she has a vigorous healthy appearance that is largely due to the active outdoor life she leads.

Regular Church Attendant

After doing the daily routine of a rural mail carrier for six days in the week, it would seem that on Sundays Mrs. Beavers would give that age-old excuse often heard: "Sunday is the only day that I have to spend in the privacy of my home." This is not the case with Mrs. Beavers. Rarely ever does a Sunday pass that she does not attend Sunday school and preaching services. "He profits most who serves best" cannot be used in any more fitting manner than in describing Mrs. Beavers and her brave, noble service. In this outdoor life of hers, she has learned in the school of service really to practice her Christianity by performing her duty to her fellow men and women whose vision of the right and the wrong may not be as clear as hers.

*Author of the *Greensboro Daily News* article Marie Gregson Cooper also had Chatham connections. She was the daughter of Julius Clarence and Mabel Hadley Gregson. Born about 1901 in Siler City, she attended Greensboro College, and married Dalton Cooper in 1922.



Biographical sketch of Mattie by her granddaughter, Milli Hammer

Mattie Mary ROGERS BEAVERS

Born: May 4, 1866, Chatham County, North Carolina

Died: May 12, 1935, Siler City, Chatham County, North Carolina

Mattie, the daughter of Levi Rogers and Julia Ann McMath, was the oldest of their four children (b 1866), Saphronia (b 1867), Jesse (b. 1871) and Oliver Newton (b.1874). When Mattie was 9 years old her mother died. For a time, Mattie kept house for her father but before long she and her siblings were living with Levi's father, Jesse Rogers. Their father remarried and sired a large second family.

Mattie met George Beavers about 1889 - they married a year later. Two months after their marriage Mattie earned a third-grade teaching certificate. No one knows if she ever taught school since she gave birth to their first child (Julia) in 1891. George and Mattie purchased a farm (probably with help from her father or her grandparents Oliver & Mary Rogers McMath). Mattie gave birth to Hallie in July 1893 while they were building their home on the farm - she gave birth to Clyde (1895), Herbert (1897), Josephine (1900), and Slocum (1904). Slocum died in 1904 and Julia in 1909, reportedly from typhoid fever contracted at college. (She attended college at what is now UNC-Greensboro.) This tragedy didn't change Mattie's determination that her daughters be well educated, so both Hallie and Josie followed in Julia's footsteps leaving home for boarding school when they were 16 and then on to college.

Mattie was the absolute matriarch of the family. Her word and decisions, by all family accounts, were law and you disobeyed at your peril. Some say Mattie was "grim" and even "grouchy," but she was extremely well-liked in the community, and her children were slavishly devoted to her. She did not live to know most of her grandchildren or for them to know her - of her 13 grandchildren, only 6 were old enough at her death to remember her.

In 1908 Mattie became a rural mail carrier. For over 24 years she delivered the mail, retiring in 1932. Women on Mattie's route would give her lists of things they needed which she purchased in town and delivered the next day. Her mail route was from Siler City to Harper's Crossroads and Bear Creek. She and her horse were a common sight on her route. It is said that Mattie almost drowned several times fording streams in flood. Mattie was fearless - in the fall of 1893 she purchased an automobile and drove alone to Chicago to the World's Fair. The fair was a landmark event in American history and Mattie spoke often of her experiences there. Many of the details of Mattie's day to day life have been lost with time and because of the deaths of those who knew her best. What remain are stories handed down through the family.

Mattie died at home at 1:30 pm, Sunday May 12, 1935. Her death certificate lists the cause of death as malnutrition due to stomach cancer. Mattie's obituary appeared on the front page of the newspaper - above the fold. It is said that at her funeral she had the most honorary pallbearers (47) seen in Chatham County at that time. She is buried in Siler City in Oakwood Cemetery beside George and three of their children - Julia, Slocum and Hallie.

Passing Sunday of Mrs. Mattie Beavers Causes Widespread Sorrow; Was Well Known, Having Served As Rural Mail Carrier For Quarter Of A Century

Mrs. Mattie Beavers, age sixty-nine years, wife of George Beavers, died at her home one mile west of Siler City, at 1:30 p. m., Sunday, May 12th, 1935, following an illness of several months' duration.

Mrs. Beavers, daughter of Levi and Julia Ann Rogers, was born and reared in Chatham county where she was widely known and highly respected. Deceased united with the Methodist church in early girlhood and was a sincere and loyal member until she was called to reap the reward of the faithful.

Mrs. Beavers was one of the very few rural letter carriers in the postal service, having rendered most excellent service in that work for a period of twenty-four and a half years. Mrs. Beavers entered the service in the year 1905 under the postmastership of L. L. Wrenn and was on continuous duty till her retirement in 1933. In speaking of Mrs. Beavers, Mr. Wrenn spoke in the highest terms of her faithfulness and her almost unlimited willingness to accommodate the patrons of her route—No. 3, which served the people in the territory lying generally southwest of Siler City.

Mrs. Beavers was one of the pioneers in the rural postal service, having begun the work when good roads were hardly known in this section and when the rounds were made with horse and buggy. None but persons with heroic wills would have stood the hardships of those early days in the rural mail service. A representative of one of the business houses of Siler City, in speaking of Mrs. Beavers' willingness to accommodate the patrons of her route, said: "After arriving from her daily round of letter carrying

Mrs. Beavers nearly every afternoon would spend much time in going from store to store to buy such little items of merchandise as the patrons of her route would ask her to bring to them the next day."

Surviving the deceased besides her husband, are two daughters, Miss Hallie Beavers, of Panama Canal Zone, Mrs. Joseph Beavers Sandrone, of Washington, D. C.; two sons, Clyde K. and Herbert Beavers of Siler City; two brothers, Jesse A. and O. N. Rogers, and one sister, Mrs. L. L. Perry, of Siler City, R3; and ten grandchildren.

Funeral services were conducted from the First M. E. church in Siler City at three o'clock Tuesday afternoon by her pastor, Rev. D. A. Clark, assisted by Revs. J. L. Price and C. E. Winslow, with interment in Oakwood cemetery.

Active pallbearers were fellow members in the R. F. D. service: Joe Moore, of Pittsboro, Burket Phillips of Mt. Vernon Springs, T. D. Bynum, Tom Gilliland and J. H. Stone (retired) of Siler City.

Honorary pallbearers were: J. R. Gilbert, Preston Phillips, Will Phillips, J. C. Fesmire, Hugh York, Billy Webster, John Emerson, Jess Alfred, Ed. Smith, W. H. Hadley, L. L. Wrenn, Preston Ivey, June Wrenn, Mr. O'Brien, N. J. Dark, Wade Paschal, Bud Teague, John Clark, Oscar Dorsett, R. M. Greene, Frank Stone, H. A. Richardson, W. J. Richardson, E. N. Richardson, Dr. Thomas, Dr. Edwards, Dr. Milliken, G. W. Brooks, L. B. Brooks, Lucius Brooks, M. M. Fox, F. M. Hadley, G. W. Blair, L. P. Dixon, J. C. Gregson, R. W. Dark, C. R. Eldens, J. T. Johnson, Sike Johnson, C. L. Brower, N. B. Bray, C. N. Bray, W. S. Durham, C. C. Brewer, J. J. Jenkins, J. W. Gilliam, of Sanford, and C. H. Hward, of St. Pauls, N. C.

Mattie's obituary

From *The Chatham News*, vol XII,
26 May 1935.



Mattie with husband George Beavers and children, about 1902-1903.



Mattie, age 48, 1914.



The Beavers home in Siler City. No longer standing.



Julia McMath Rogers, Mattie's mother.



Above left to right: Hallie, Herbert, Josephine (Josie) Beavers and unknown.



Levi Rogers, Mattie's father.

Two Siler City Streets are named for the Beavers family: George Street for George Beavers and Beaver St. for Mattie Beavers.

