

Ruth Gordon's Pittsboro ~ 1930s

What was Pittsboro like in the 1930s? We are fortunate to have a first-hand, real-time account thanks to a paper written by Pittsboro resident Ruth Gordon in 1939. At the time, Ruth was a student at the Women's College or UNC at Greensboro and the paper was likely produced for a class assignment. (She received an "A.") The paper covers life in Pittsboro as Ruth experienced it—discussing work; religion; education; politics; and home, community, and social life in her hometown. Ruth's granddaughter, Samantha Averitt, shared a digital copy of Ruth's handwritten paper with us and we'll share it here. It is a rich resource, particularly since it preserves Ruth's immediate observations, rather than reminiscences.

Ruth's paper preserves details about life in 1930s Pittsboro that are not easily found elsewhere. For example, she notes that the four major denominations in Pittsboro—Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian—each held services only once a month, but that many people attended services at more than one church. She believed this practice had a unifying effect—bringing together people who might otherwise not mingle. She also describes a dispute within the Baptist Church over removing trees from the churchyard that doesn't seem to have made the local paper at the time.

Ruth's observations were, of course, influenced by her own place in the town. By her own admission, she saw distinctions between town folks and country folks, middle-class and mill workers, white and Black. Her views are clearly those of a white, middle-class young woman. Ruth grew up in Pittsboro, the daughter of Roscoe R. and Gladys S. Gordon. Her father was the minister at the Pittsboro Baptist Church from 1923 to 1926 and at several other Chatham churches subsequently. Ruth attended local public schools, and newspaper accounts indicate that she was an outstanding student—a trait she apparently continued during her college career. She graduated with a degree in English in 1940. She moved away from Chatham after graduation and married Samuel Averitt in 1942.

We are grateful to Ruth's granddaughter, Samantha, for recognizing the value of Ruth's paper to our history and for sharing it with us.

Read [Ruth Gordon's "A Community Study of Pittsboro"](#) on our website.

