

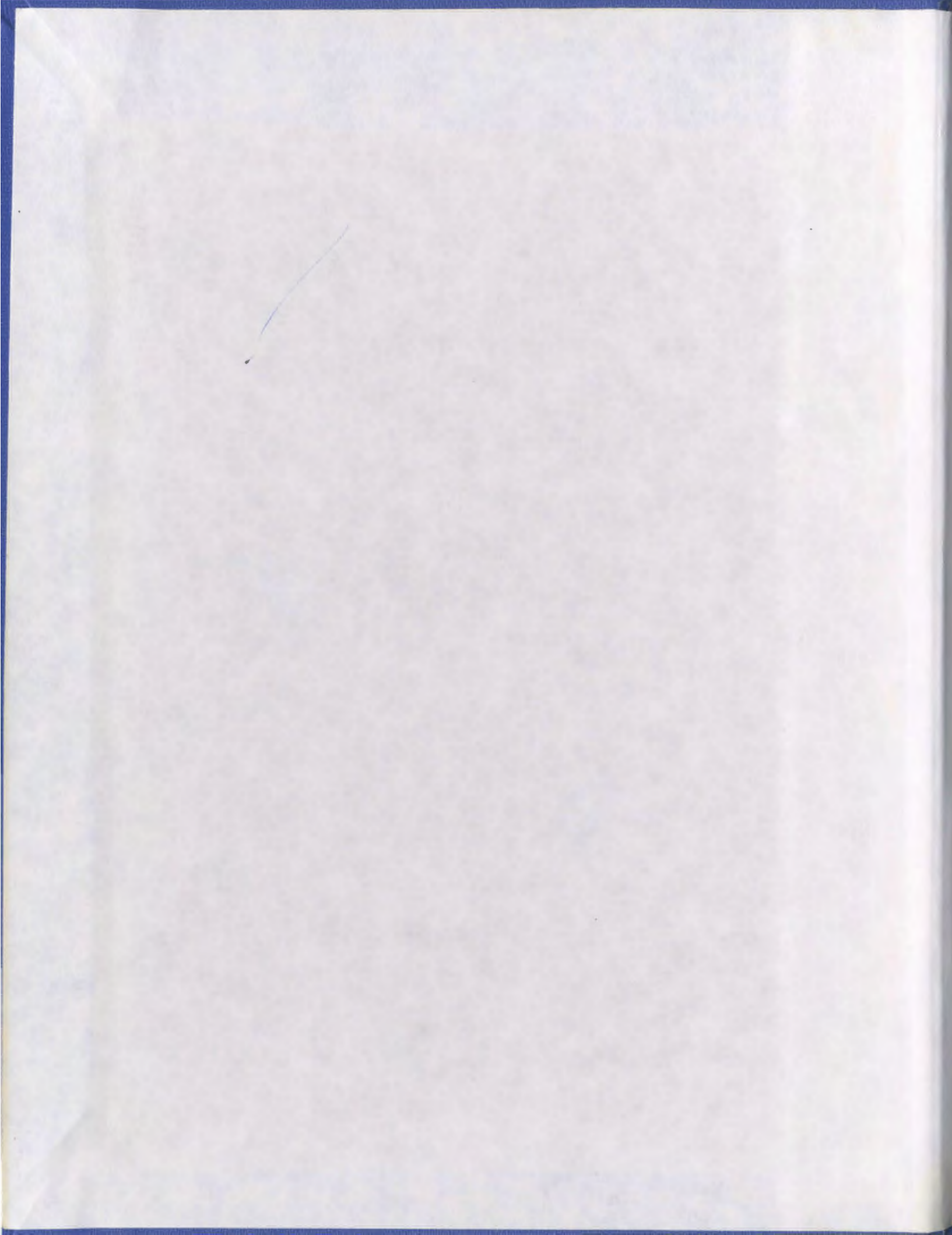
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A SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY
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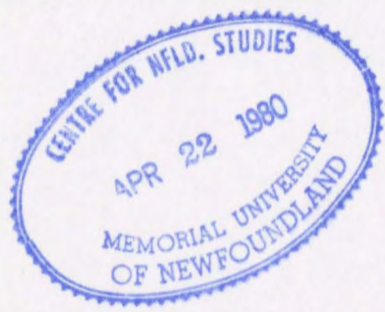
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FAMILY IDENTITY AND THE SOCIAL USE OF FOLKLORE:

A SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY TRADITION

© Mary Amanda Dargan, A.B.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Folklore
Memorial University of Newfoundland
October 1978

St. John's

Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

This study examines the pastimes and verbal art of a large family network whose geographic center is a community in northeastern South Carolina. Patterns of leisure and patterns of performance in verbal art are described and analyzed in terms of their function and use in the family. The focus is on verbal art and such problems as the relationship between performer and audience, the recognition of ownership and expertise, and the presentation of images of family and self in storytelling.

The purpose of the study is to show how these forms of expressive behavior express and help to maintain a sense of family identity.

Family pastimes are organized according to family membership and are sources of and settings for storytelling. Family members use storytelling and other expressive behavior to project a specific image of their group or of themselves as individuals. These images are highly self-conscious and can be played with for different audiences and situations. They not only reflect family self-images but also involve plays on the images family members think others have of them or of groups with which they are identified, in particular Southern rural whites.

Family members can also express a sense of family identity by using private expressions and private references in storytelling which only the family understands. They can tell their stories a little differently for their relatives than for outsiders. This study looks at the forms and

devices family members use for expressing esoteric knowledge in their verbal art.

The questions of what it means to belong to a family and of when family ties become important to members of this kin network are also addressed in the thesis. Observation of family interaction and interviews with family members led to the conclusion that family membership involves not only kinship ties but also ties of friendship and proximity. It also involves the shared knowledge of a common past, of images of the family which can be used in verbal performance, of the rights and obligations entailed in kinship relations, and of the ways family ties can be used in organizing family pastimes.

Individual family members belong not to one, but to many families based on different ways of grouping their kindred. Part of being a member of the family is knowing which family ties are relevant to different kinds of interaction and which images of family group are appropriate to certain situations. Family members can identify themselves or their relatives with one family group in one situation and with another in a different situation. This thesis focuses on the expression of family identity in pastimes and verbal art, for it is in these that family identity seems to find its clearest, most creative expression.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was made possible with the help of many persons. My thanks go first to my thesis advisor, Dr. Herbert Halpert, for his patient guidance during the research and writing of this work. This thesis took its initial shape as a term paper for his course on legend, and it was he who encouraged me to continue studying my own family. I also owe a great deal to my other professors of the Folklore Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland: Dr. David Hufford, Dr. Neil Rosenberg, Professor Lawrence Small, and Dr. Richard Tallman in whose classes many of the ideas for this thesis were formed. Thanks are also due for my professors at the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Shirley Brice Heath and Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, for their valuable comments on a paper based on this work. In addition, I am grateful to Memorial University for a university fellowship, which supported me for my first two years of study, and to the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive for a three-year assistantship.

The Interlibrary Loan Departments of both the Henrietta Harvey Library at Memorial University and the James A. Rogers Library at Francis Marion College in South Carolina deserve thanks for obtaining many of the articles and books for this thesis. I am especially indebted to Horace Fraser Rudisill, historian and archivist of the Darlington County Historical Society Archive, for help in locating information on the county and on my family. He made my research easier not only by allowing me to use his

files at the archive but also by organizing, over the years, much of the material family members have in their own homes and also by contributing to the family's knowledge of its past by locating documents which filled in many of the gaps. He ~~was~~ also kind enough to read and make corrections on the second chapter.

For references, suggestions, and the opportunity to discuss ideas, I thank my fellow students at Memorial University and at the University of Pennsylvania, particularly Laurel Doucette, Anne Kaplan, Martin Lovelace, Monica Morrison, Amy Shuman, and Michael Taft. Michael Taft deserves special thanks for reading and offering suggestions on an early draft of the thesis, and my friends, Jane Boris, Elizabeth Dayton, and Anne Kaplan, for help with proofreading the final copy.

To my father, Lucas Dargan, I owe my greatest debt. From start to finish he helped more than anyone in preparing "our thesis." He accompanied me on many of my interviews, located documents, discussed ideas, and obtained last-minute information when I was too far away to do it for myself. He also spent weeks reading and editing the final draft of the thesis. Other members of my "immediate family" also deserve special thanks for their encouragement and support: my mother, Frances Dargan, and my sisters, Jackie, Sarah, and Rosa.

Finally, I wish to thank all the members of my family whose names appear in this thesis for allowing me to study them and for making the task so enjoyable. This thesis is dedicated to them.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Aims

Many families I have known have a collection of stories, private expressions, and nicknames which family members delight in telling and using in family settings. These expressions are significant not only as family entertainment, but also as an important force in shaping family identity. They are creative expressions of shared experiences, a common past, and a sense of family group. This study examines the traditions of one large family network whose geographic center is a community located in the Midlands region of South Carolina. It focuses on family-centered pastimes and verbal art to show how these traditions express and help to maintain a sense of family identity.

Since family identity and family traditions are tied up with the kinship relations of family members, a large part of this thesis is also devoted to kinship. In my study of this family network I found that blood relationship is the basis but alone is not sufficient for developing a sense of family membership. Friendship, geographic proximity, and a willingness to participate in family activities are also important.

It also became clear that the total array of kinship relationships one individual has does not make up one family but many families. From the point of view of the individual, his personal kindred is differentiated into several kinds of family grouping, each of which has the possibility of

becoming relevant in specific situations. Thus, individual family members have a range of family identities to choose from. In a particular situation, the one they select to foreground is significant.¹

The question of what it means to belong to a family and when family ties become relevant to members of this kin network will be considered in this study. I would like to suggest that family identity and the sense of belonging to a family are expressed and reinforced to a large extent through pastimes and verbal art. In a 1968 article, Roger D. Abrahams suggested, "Even our concept of the family may ultimately have to be described in terms of the shared expressions which arise out of the shared experiences."² Although Abrahams's statement does not account for all of the complexities of family identity, this thesis supports his suggestion that shared expressions and stories do play an important part in developing a sense of family group.

My approach is primarily synchronic, to look at a present family group and analyze the dynamics of their social interaction and their folkloric communication through verbal art. But to limit it to a synchronic approach would be misguided, since the family's knowledge and view of its own past is very much a part of the present. Thus, it is also diachronic in its examination of how the present concepts of family and community developed over the generations since ancestors of the present

¹ "Foreground" is used here to mean to call attention to and make important. It is the English translation of the Czech term for this concept developed by the Prague School. See, Bohuslav Havranek, "The Functional Differentiation of the Standard Language," in A Prague School Reader in Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style, ed. Paul L. Garvin (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 1964), pp. 3-16.

² Roger D. Abrahams, "A Rhetoric of Everyday Life: Traditional Conversational Genres," Southern Folklore Quarterly, 32 (1968), 59.

family members first settled in the area. By presenting a brief history of the family and their recollections of changes in the community and the family structure over the years, my intention is to give a background against which to view the present group. In doing so, I also hope to show how their sense of their past has influenced the ways they view themselves today.

I have focused on the ways in which family members talk, perform, and interact among themselves. A consideration of their relations with persons outside of the family would be valuable for a broader understanding of the family, but it would require a much larger study than this thesis can attempt. What I have shown, however, is the way family members view themselves in relation to outsiders and the roles outsiders play in their verbal art, both as individual personalities and as the generalized "outsider" against whom the family contrasts itself. Family members have many stories and expressions about outsiders and families other than their own, but they often seem to take the greatest pleasure in talking about and among themselves. This thesis, therefore, deals only with their esoteric verbal expressions, omitting, for the most part, expressions relating primarily to outsiders.

Even though this study deals only with the relations within the family, it is not intended to dismiss questions of their relationship to the outside world. The family is not an isolated group. Indeed, individual family members are very much involved in the social, political, and economic affairs of their area and of their state. The boundaries of family group which they perceive are not set up against an outside society but exist within a larger community of people with whom they also share a

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sense of identity, although not a sense of blood kinship. As my discussion of the family tradition will show, the relationship of the group to the outside, and of the individual to the group, is extremely complex.

The family network I am describing is made up of several extended families who have intermarried over the generations until they have gradually come to think of themselves as one family. At the same time, they have maintained their identities as separate families based on different ways of grouping their kin. Within the community which forms the center of this network, there are five last-name family groups: Ervins, Dargans, Howards, Williamsons, and Jeffers. It is through the Ervins and the Dargans and the two marriages between them in the early 1900s, however, that the present group finds its primary identification as a family. Thus, the group is often known, both by its own members and by persons outside the family, as the "Dargan-Ervin clan."

The family's roots in the area run deep. Ancestors of the present family members were among those who settled in the South Carolina Midlands during the 1700s and built small plantations along the rivers. Some family members still farm the land settled by these ancestors. Others trace their land ownership to the late 1800s and early 1900s when their grandparents or great-grandparents moved from another part of the county to the present location.

Members of this central group live on adjoining farms spanning two counties, but the family network also includes many living outside this area in varying degrees of "closeness." As I will show later, the boundaries of the family and of the community are not fixed, but flexible. It

is a family network which can be characterized as more open than closed, for new members are continually being added by marriage, by a reaffirmation of family membership by relatives who had "lost touch," and by the discovery of new kinship ties. The family is composed of a network of persons bound by ties of kinship, whose concepts of family and community have and will continue to change.

I myself have been and continue to be part of this community and the family which composes its population. I chose to study my own family for three main reasons. One was for the advantages the insider has when studying highly esoteric material. An outsider might eventually be able to get much of the same information, but it would require a much longer period of study. It is also doubtful that an outsider could ever become completely aware of the many subtleties of family interaction and verbal art that the insider realizes exist. Secondly, the complexity of the family itself makes it an interesting group to study. Members of this family have lived in the same area and on the same land for several generations. As a result, there is a strong sense of family identity within the group. Thirdly, it is also a family which has a great deal of contact with the world outside the community, which makes it a good group in which to observe the effects of a changing society on the family.

Previous Scholarship

In spite of the large amount of literature on American families, our understanding of American kinship is still very narrow. Studies of kinship have provided valuable descriptions of kinship terminologies and

rules of residence and descent, but relatively few accounts have been given of how kinship is used in everyday life. There has been a greater concern with the relationship of the family to the larger social structure than with the implications of kinship for the study of small group behavior.

Theories about American families have been developed, for the most part, in the context of urban America. They have tended to emphasize the general pattern rather than the particular case. From such studies, sociologists have provided a model of the "typical American family:" nuclear household, isolated from other relatives, mobile, 3.1 members. Anthropologists have done valuable studies of national and regional kinship patterns and terminologies, but there has been a serious lack of attention given to how particular families or communities operate on the basis of kinship.³ Studies such as Ray L. Birdwhistell's study of family relationships in two Southern white communities and Carol B. Stack's analysis of kin networks in a Southern black community are rare.⁴

Social scientists have stressed the distinction between theories of kinship structure and principles for recognizing membership in a functioning family group. One is the researcher's model of kinship organization and the other, the viewpoint of individuals engaging in social interaction with the persons he considers his kinsmen. These models of kinship

³ Ward S. Goodenough, "Yankee Kinship Terminology," in Cognitive Anthropology, ed. Stephen Tyler (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, Inc., 1969), pp. 255-288; David M. Schneider, American Kinship: A Cultural Account (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

⁴ Ray Lee Birdwhistell, "Border County: A Study of Socialization and Mobility Potential," Diss. University of Chicago 1951; Carol B. Stack, All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974).

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structure may differ from an individual's identification with a particular family group. To describe a family as a socially meaningful unit, therefore, requires detailed observation and description of the role kinship plays in the daily lives of individual family members.

Some patterns of family interaction have received attention. Social scientists have examined the reciprocal rights and obligations and, to a more limited extent, the patterns of leisure of families, but the expression of family identity through verbal art has generally been neglected. This is clearly an area of family life which folklorists have the skills to examine. Until recently, however, folklorists have virtually ignored verbal art as a form of family interaction. Collections were made of items of folklore in family repertoires which could be established as having a long tradition in time and space,⁵ but the verbal art which expressed family experiences and which family members used to talk about and among themselves was left out. In these collections, families were used as laboratories for studying certain kinds of material rather than as the focus of study themselves. A few family studies gave family reminiscences and legends as background to the more "traditional" material, but even this was rare.⁶

One reason for this neglect has been that until recently folklorists

⁵ Terry M Carbo, "The Faith Healing Beliefs of a New Orleans Family," Louisiana Folklore Miscellany, 2 (1968), 91-100; Rosanna M. Giusti, "The Life-Cycle Beliefs of a New Orleans Family of French-Italian Background," Louisiana Folklore Miscellany, 3 (1975), 3-28; Beverly Hawkins, "Folklore of a Black Family," Journal of the Ohio Folklore Society, 2 (1973), 2-19.

⁶ Patrick Mullen, "Folk Songs and Family Traditions," Publications of the Texas Folklore Society, 37 (1972), 49-63; Leonard Roberts, Sang Branch Settlers: Folksongs and Tales of a Kentucky Mountain Family (Austin, Texas: Univ. of Texas Press, 1974). Hereafter Publications of the Texas Folklore Society will be cited PTFS.

have been more concerned with gifted raconteurs and singers whose repertoires included highly traditional material. Since a large portion of the expressive repertoires of most families consists of personal experience stories, anecdotes about family characters, reminiscences, nicknames, and private words and sayings, the assumption has been that this material, which may not be known outside a particular family, is not "traditional," and is, therefore, not within the realm of folklore study.

As a result, in many of the collections of family folklore, the material which could not be established as traditional was excluded. In an article on the tales of a Greek-American family, for example, Richard Dorson adds a footnote in which he regrets having excluded from the collection one personal experience story. He later found the same story, told as true, in a magazine article. The story was therefore established as traditional and, Dorson argues, should have been included.⁷

Although for many years folklorists avoided the parts of family repertoires which they did not consider traditional, a few scholars suggested that this material deserved attention in its own right. In an article published in 1971, Herbert Halpert suggested that family narratives told as true deserved consideration in legend study.⁸ Others calling for the study of this material asked that family folklore be considered a distinct genre. In 1968, Jan Brunvand pointed to the need to collect the whole

⁷ Richard Dorson, "Tales of a Greek-American Family on Tape," Fabula, 1 (1957), 115.

⁸ Herbert Halpert, "Definition and Variation in Folk Legend," in American Folk Legend: A Symposium, ed. Wayland D. Hand (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), pp. 52-53.

range of family narrative traditions, but made no commitment to the genre concept himself:

First person reminiscences and family stories have long puzzled American folklore collectors and scholars. How many repetitions are needed; or how widely must a tradition be spread for it to qualify as folklore? How can we draw distinctions between unstructured musings, polished retellings of events, memorates, and personal legends? Every folklorist who has tape recorded good informants has had to deal with such questions. It has been asserted, with some convincing examples, that family traditions constitute a traditional category including favorite anecdotes about eccentric relatives, often-repeated -- and somewhat embellished -- experiences, nicknames, and expressions of a family group, and the like... If nothing else, personal reminiscences of these kinds do furnish background for the folklore texts of gifted informants, and even if for this reason alone, they ought to be collected.⁹

C.W. von Sydow talked about "family saga," which he described as "multi-episodic legends" and gave as examples the Icelandic and Scandinavian sagas, which "tell of actual events" and "are known and of interest only within confined, geographical regions, where the acting persons are known."¹⁰ Mody C. Boatright, who was more concerned with family saga in the North American setting, explained his use of the term:

I use the term family saga mainly to denote a lore that tends to cluster around families, which is preserved and modified by oral transmission and which is believed to be true. Lore that is handed down as folklore is excluded. I am, then, not concerned with a type of tale but with clusters of types, not with a motif, but with many motifs.¹¹

⁹ Jan Harold Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1968), p. 93.

¹⁰ C.W. von Sydow, "The Categories of Prose Tradition," in Selected Papers on Folklore, ed. Laurits Bødker (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1948), p. 87.

¹¹ Mody C. Boatright et al., eds. The Family Saga: And Other Phases of American Folklore (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 1.

The approach to family folklore as a separate genre has several weaknesses. One is that it tends to emphasize the forms of verbal art rather than their use and meaning in a particular family group. It also promotes the tendency to look only at the material which can be established as traditional, in the themes and forms which continually reappear in the repertoires of families, rather than in the material which may be known and told only within a particular family group. The concept of "family saga" also has the weakness of distinguishing the family material from the kinds of verbal art used outside a family context with which it has much in common. The verbal art of a family will have some unique features, but it will also share some similar forms of expression with the verbal art of other groups.

While Boatright was more interested in stories which appeared in many family repertoires, several student papers published under his editorship looked at particular families and their verbal traditions. Although some of the examples they gave could also be found in other families, some were probably based on actual experiences of family members. These articles give some idea of the range of material which exists in family repertoires, but, with the exception of Kim Garrett's article, "Family Stories and Sayings,"¹² they are mostly collections of texts with little background information given and no analysis of their significance and use in the family setting.¹³ They are important in their treating "traditional"

¹² Kim S. Garrett, "Family Stories and Sayings," in Singers and Storytellers, eds. Mody C. Boatright et al., Publications of the Texas Folklore Society, No. 30 (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 273-281.

¹³ The articles appeared in Mody C. Boatright et al., eds., Madstones and Twisters, PTFS, No. 28 (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1958).

and "non-traditional" material the same, indicating that for the persons who tell these stories the distinction either is not made or is not useful.

A notable exception to the family folklore articles which deal only with texts is Kathryn L. Morgan's study of her own family's legends, in which she describes how her family's stories about her great-grandmother Caddy were used as buffers to overcome the fear and anger they experienced being black in a white-dominated society:

Caddy legends have served as "buffers" for the children in our family for four generations. Although there are many similar narratives in folk histories dealing with the ordeals of slavery, with its whippings, rapes, murder, escapes and pursuits, they did not belong to us, as did the legends of Caddy. The other narratives along with the Negro spirituals, finally belonged to the world but Caddy was ours.¹⁴

Morgan shows how the stories about her grandmother held a special significance for her family and played an important role in the family's image of itself.

With the recent shift in folklore scholarship away from a concept of folklore as oral tradition and toward an expressive behavior model, the kinds of material which often exist in family repertoires, such as personal

See: J.D. Bradley, "Reminiscences of a Texas Pioneer," pp. 149-153; Guadalupe Duarte, "Around the Fire with my Abuelitos," pp. 154-159; Maurita Russell Lueg, "Russell Tales," pp. 160-166; F.S. Wade, "The Adventures of Ad Lawrence," pp. 133-148.

¹⁴ Kathryn L. Morgan, "Caddy Buffers: Legends of a Middle Class Negro Family in Philadelphia," Keystone Folklore Quarterly, 10 (1966), 69.

narratives, expressions, reminiscences, and nicknames, have gained acceptance as areas of study. The linguist William Labov presented a linguistic analysis of personal experience narratives in a joint article with Joshua Waletzky in 1967 and in a chapter of a more recent book, Language in the Inner City, both of which were useful in my own analysis of personal narratives.¹⁵ But it has been only recently that folklorists have given this narrative genre serious attention. Lawrence G. Small's Master's thesis, "Patterns in Personal Experience Narratives: Storytelling at Cod Harbour, A Newfoundland Fishing Community,"¹⁶ was one of the early folklore studies to concentrate on personal narratives, and since then the number of studies has increased every year. The programs of the American Folklore Society's annual meetings are clear evidence of the growing interest in this genre.

The use of private words and expressions within closely-knit groups, including families, has been observed by many scholars, but folklorists still have not given this genre the attention it deserves. In an article published in 1962, Allen Walker Read, who described the family as the "fundamental speech community," gave examples of private expressions among English-speaking families.¹⁷ He quoted other scholars who pointed out

¹⁵ William Labov and Joshua Waletzky, "Narrative Analysis," in Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts, ed. June Helm (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1967), pp. 12-44; William Labov, "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax," in Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), pp. 354-396.

¹⁶ Lawrence G. Small, "Patterns in Personal Experience Narratives: Storytelling at Cod Harbour, a Newfoundland Fishing Community," Thesis Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland 1971.

¹⁷ Allen Walker Read, "Family Words in English," American Speech, 37 (1962), 5-12.

the existence of this esoteric language within families, although they did not examine it themselves.

In 1913, for example, George Philip Krapp wrote, "Certain forms of speech will be used only among the members of the family in their family relations and these will often be the very forms which give the group its deepest sense of intimacy and unity."¹⁸ Eric Partridge gave some examples of family words and wrote:

All families, if they are more than a mere collection of related individuals, if they often meet together, and especially if they prefer their own company to that of others, have their own private slang; some few an extensive vocabulary, most a score or a dozen or even fewer words and phrases. Occasionally a stranger will hear a complete sentence that obviously means something different.¹⁹

The Irish archaeologist, R.A. Stewart Macalister, gave more evidence of this genre of family folklore:

Probably every family, even of moderate size has a more or less extensive vocabulary of current words and phrases, the sources of which may have been forgotten -- may even never have been known to the junior members -- but which are quite comprehensible in the household, though totally unintelligible outside.²⁰

It has also been observed that small communities and closely-knit groups share private expressions and words. It is surprising, therefore, that these expressions have received so little attention.²¹ Roger Abrahams

¹⁸ George Philip Krapp, "Standards of Speech and Their Value," Modern Philology, 11 (1913), 59.

¹⁹ Eric Partridge, Slang Today and Yesterday (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1933), p. 148.

²⁰ R.A. Stewart Macalister, The Secret Languages of Ireland (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1937), pp. 91-92.

²¹ M.A.K. Halliday, "Anti-Languages," American Anthropologist, 78 (1976), 570-584; Lawrence G. Small, "Traditional Expressions in a New-foundland Community," Lore and Language, 2 (1975), 15-18.

called for an investigation of these expressions in 1968,²² but to date only a few studies have followed his suggestion. Four short works which deal with private expressions: an article by Lawrence G. Small, an article by Kim Garrett, and two booklets published by the Smithsonian's Family Folklore Program, were useful for a comparison and analysis of my own material.²³

The study of certain genres within the context of a family group has also become increasingly popular in the past few years. In 1974 the Family Folklore Program was started as part of the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife. Stories, reminiscences, expressions, and photographs were collected from festival-goers and compiled in two booklets, "I'd Like To Think They Were Pirates" and Family Folklore.²⁴

There is at least one Ph.D. dissertation on a particular family's folklore, Karen Baldwin's "Down on Bugger Run: Family Group and the Social Base of Folklore,"²⁵ and a few dissertations and theses in progress.

These studies and hopefully my own show how folklorists have neglected some of the richest areas of family folklore.

²² Abrahams, 59.

²³ Small, Expressions; Garrett, Family; Holly Cutting-Baker et al., eds., Family Folklore (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1976), pp. 53-56; Steve Zeitlin, Sandra Gross, and Holly Cutting-Baker, eds., "I'd Like To Think They Were Pirates" (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1975), pp. 30-32.

²⁴ Zeitlin, Gross, Cutting-Baker, Pirates; Cutting-Baker et al., Family.

²⁵ Karen Baldwin, "'Down on Bugger Run:' Family Group and the Social Base of Folklore," Diss. University of Pennsylvania 1975.

An important concept for this study is the esoteric-exoteric principle operating in the family's folklore. Using William Hugh Jansen's definitions, the esoteric "applies to what the group thinks of itself and what it supposes others think of it," and the exoteric is "what one group thinks of another and what it thinks that other group thinks it thinks."²⁶ Although my main interest in this study is with the esoteric ideas and expressions used in the family's verbal art, I hope to show how exoteric attitudes also appear in the stories and expressions which family members tell about themselves.

Another concept central to this study is the idea of stereotypes. The term as I use it refers to a collection of traits which are accepted as appropriate in characterizing a group of persons. This definition is adapted from Edgar Vinacke's use of the term in an article, "Stereotypes as Social Concepts."²⁷ My use of the term is also derived from Jansen's idea of the esoteric-exoteric principle, for I use it to refer to the traits individuals ascribe to their own groups as well as to other groups. Stereotypes are ideas which may or may not be accurate. They may be positive or negative. They are a way of selecting and generalizing from complexity of human behavior those traits which are perceived as particularly characteristic of certain groups.

This concept is also related to the term, blason populaire, used by many folklorists studying one group's stereotype of another. Although

²⁶ William Hugh Jansen, "The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore," in The Study of Folklore, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 46.

²⁷ Edgar Vinacke, "Stereotypes as Social Concepts," Journal of Social Psychology, 46 (1957), 230.

American folklorists have generally translated the term to mean "ethnic slur,"²⁸ when coined by Alfred Canel in 1859, the term included positive as well as negative traits.²⁹ In this study Canel's concept of blason populaire will be used.

Procedures

The field work and research for this study were carried out over a two-year period. The most intensive field work was done during a three-week period in December, 1974, and January, 1975; a four-month period in the spring and summer of 1975; and a five-week period in the winter of 1975-1976. I also continued to take notes and interview sporadically while I was living in the community and writing my thesis, from May to December, 1976.

My primary method was to observe through listening and participating in community activities the way family members interact on the basis of kinship and the ways they express themselves through verbal art. Since the periods in which I concentrated my field research were during the Christmas holidays and summer months, when family gatherings and visiting are particularly frequent, I had many opportunities to observe family interaction and verbal performance in their natural context. At these occasions I either took notes when I had a free moment away from the group, or I wrote notes from memory immediately after I returned home.

²⁸ Alan Dundes, The Study of Folklore (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 43.

²⁹ Alfred Canel, Blason Populaire de la Normandie, 2 vols. (Rouen: Lebrument, 1859).

I also took detailed notes on the daily interaction and topics of conversation between family members.

Another procedure I used in field research was to interview individual family members. Interviews were, for the most part, unstructured, depending on the informant. For some, I had to mention only that I was interested in family stories and expressions and in their memories of growing up in the community, and they needed little further prompting. With others, I directed the conversation toward specific topics: family history, pastimes, stories, cooperation within the family, and attitudes toward the family. As my work progressed and I became more familiar with the material I made my questions more specific.

I recorded these interviews either by taking notes or by taping. One weakness of my taped interviews was that most were with only one or two persons. As a result, although I wrote down my observations of the interaction between audience and narrator in storytelling in my field notes, I have very few examples of this interaction to quote from my taped interviews.

Since I was studying my own family, I could draw on my experiences growing up in the community in addition to my observations during the period of my field work. This presented special problems. Many social scientists would argue that it is impossible to be objective about a group of people one knows and loves. Yet, no researcher who has worked in a culture in any depth is free from feelings about the people she has studied. The best we can do as social scientists is recognize these feelings and biases and understand how they have influenced our thinking and where they might have limited our results.

In my own work, for example, I found that initially I took many

things for granted and failed to ask for certain kinds of material, assuming that if it existed I would have known about it. As I continued my investigation, I began to appreciate the complexity of the family tradition, and I was forced to look at areas of family life which I had previously ignored. I soon learned to ask questions which would uncover things I had not known.

There were other problems besides that of subjectivity which limited the kind of material I was able to obtain. Stories and expressions about persons still living were sometimes hard to elicit, especially if they were derogatory. Certain kinds of narratives, such as off-color stories, were also difficult to collect. Not only is there a general feeling against telling these stories across generations, but certain family members were also reluctant to have such material included in a study of the family.

The importance of historical accuracy and the knowledge that the material I was collecting would be used in my thesis inhibited many family members. When I told one uncle that I was interested in family stories and family history, he brought out a series of local historical journals and pointed out some of the family narratives in them. But when I requested that he tell some of his own stories, he said, "No, not those old things. Not for publication. You don't know how much truth is in them." A later chapter will show how this attitude is reflected in family storytelling.

Generally, however, family members were enthusiastic about my project and gave me their cooperation. They were patient not only in answering my questions, but many relatives also called or volunteered stories and other information at family gatherings. I was surprised when they offered

criticisms of themselves and of past generations, presenting what they saw as the good and bad features of the family's way of life.

One of their main concerns was that I try to present an "objective" rather than a "romantic" picture of the family. Some suggested that I do this by asking outsiders and in-laws to give me their frank impressions of the family. I found that much of my concern about asking sensitive questions was unnecessary when family members volunteered information which I had avoided. Some even offered very private information on the condition that I not mention the material specifically in my thesis but use it only to draw general conclusions about the family.

My difficulty with being objective was alleviated somewhat by my having lived away from the community for several years, which gave me a better perspective than I might otherwise have had. It allowed me to see the community to some degree both as insider and outsider. In areas of family life where I found objectivity to be a major problem, I so indicated in my discussion. There may, of course, be areas in which I was not aware of my subjectivity.

For the most part, I found that being a part of the culture I was studying had a tremendous advantage and that my relationship with the family could play a positive role in my approach. Alan Dundes, in his notes to Kathryn Morgan's study of her family's legends, agrees that the subjective insight of a folklorist studying her own family can be valuable:

While some might object to a professional folklorist recording his own traditions (and those of his parents and children) on the grounds that he may be too personally involved with the informants and the data to be objective, it could be argued that it is precisely the subjective sense of involvement which

makes Professor Morgan's study so valuable. This is not just a folklorist writing about somebody else's folklore; this is a folklorist writing with fervor and conviction about her own folklore.³⁰

In his presidential address to the American Folklore Society in 1956, Herbert Halpert strongly urged folklorists to encourage students to study their own communities:

The trained folklorist has to spend a long period as a "participant-observer" in a community before he can get the "inside" view of how the community ticks and what functions its folklore serves. Even then he must also be lucky enough to find the right informants to give the proper perspective. But a college student collecting in his own community usually has had eighteen or more years in which to learn what his neighbors say, and how they think and act, with the further advantage of hearing parents and friends demonstrate or comment on most aspects of the folkways of his neighborhood. He himself has always had a natural role as audience or participant.³¹

I found that being able to draw on my own experiences had several advantages. I could use myself as an informant. It also meant that I did not have to be concerned with establishing rapport or with carefully assuming a particular role in the community, problems which folklorists who are outsiders must face. Since I have lived in the community all of my life and have spent many of my vacations there since I left to go to school, I did not have to go through a period of getting reacquainted with the family, nor was my presence there seen as unusual. It was, however, the first time I had had long conversations with many of the

³⁰ Alan Dundes, ed. Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 595.

³¹ Herbert Halpert, "Folklore: Breadth versus Depth," Journal of American Folklore, 71 (1958): 102-103.

older members of the family, and the close relationship I gained through knowing them better has been one of the greatest rewards of my research.

Since I was primarily interested in the way family members perform verbal art within the family group, being an "insider" also had the advantage of being able to observe the family's verbal expressions as they are normally performed. Family members felt no need to explain their stories and other expressions as they might have for an outsider. Although the taped sessions were not natural contexts for verbal performance, most family members seemed to change their normal performance styles very little for the interview situation, assuming, perhaps, that I would rewrite the material in a way that outsiders would understand. Several expressed doubts about whether outsiders would appreciate or understand family stories, but none appeared to change their performances for the outside audience they knew would read them.

Had the researcher been an outsider, however, many of the particularly esoteric stories and expressions would have been excluded on the assumption that they would be meaningless, and those which an outsider could appreciate would be told differently with less emphasis on the private references and with explanations which normally would be unnecessary in a family situation. An outsider would not only have problems understanding the private references but would also find it difficult to recognize some expressions as esoteric. The common exclamation, "Confound it," for example, would probably go unnoticed, but members of the family know that when said in a certain tone of voice it is a conscious imitation of Joe Dargan, who died in the 1960s. Expressions such as this, which are spoken with no clues given as to their point of reference can be recognized and appreciated only by an insider.

Obviously, this method of drawing on one's own experiences as part of a group and of observing from the point of view of a participant is a method that an outsider could not utilize. This kind of study would be difficult to duplicate, therefore, except by persons who choose to study their own culture. It is significant that almost all of the studies of family folklore have been made by persons studying their own families. This does not mean that the point of view of an outsider would not be valuable. Perhaps the best approach to take in studying this kind of material, as anthropologists have already discovered, is through a team effort which combines the insights of an outsider and an insider, both trained in the discipline.

Some of the best studies of individual family groups, their social interaction, and their use of verbal art, have been written by persons describing their own families from a nonacademic approach. Three of these were especially useful in making comparisons to my own family material. They were: Paulette Jiles's study of her Ozark Mountains family, Ben Robertson's study of his Upcountry South Carolina family, and Jean Ritchie's study of her Kentucky mountain family.³² These studies show the value of the subjective insight which a writer can bring to the study of his or her own culture, an insight from which the academic folklorist can profit as well.

In my transcriptions of recorded interviews I have tried to be as

³² Paulette Jiles, "Card Players and Story Tellers," This Magazine is About Schools, 5 (1971), 73-102; Ben Robertson, Red Hills and Cotton: An Upcountry Memory (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1973); Jean Ritchie, Singing Family of the Cumberlands (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

accurate and as complete as possible. I have not, however, attempted to reproduce the dialect of the speakers. Commonly unspoken endings, such as the final "g" are supplied. Words frequently abbreviated, such as "cause" for "because," "go" for "going to," and "cross" for "across," remain as they were spoken since supplying the missing word or syllable would change the natural rhythm of speech.

I have included false starts and pause words since they are important for understanding a narrator's normal way of speaking. False starts and incompleted sentences are followed by a dash except where the false starts are part of a continued thought, in which case they are followed by a comma. In speech where words were left unspoken with the assumption that the audience could fill in, I have supplied the missing words in square brackets not underlined. Three dots indicate that I have deleted part of the text.

Extralinguistic features such as gestures and laughter are given underlined in square brackets, such as [demonstrates by clapping hands]. [Laughter] indicates general laughter by the audience; [laughs] indicates laughter from the speaker only. Stressed words are underlined in the text. My own explanations, such as last names and relationships between persons mentioned in the text, where I felt they were necessary for understanding what was being said, are given in parentheses. Also given in parentheses are interjections by the audience which do not interrupt the flow of narration of the main speaker.

The same procedure has been used in quoting from interviews recorded in my field notebooks. It should be kept in mind, however, that these transcriptions are not as accurate as those recorded on tape. False starts and pause words are seldom included in these quotes. I have tried

to quote as accurately as possible, but most of these texts from my field notes are approximations of what was said. For the examples which I wrote down from memory after the event, I have not attempted to quote directly, but have paraphrased instead. Readers can identify the quotes from taped interviews and those from field notes by the abbreviation FN for field notes followed by the number of the notebook and T for taped interviews followed by my field numbers for the tapes. These are given in parenthesis at the end of the quote. All of the tapes and notebooks have been deposited in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folkllore and Language Archive and accessioned under the number 75-106. Appendix A gives the dates covered by the field notebooks and the dates and informants of the taped interviews.

Organization of Material

The material in this thesis is divided into three main sections: the historical, geographical, and social background of the family and their region; the family's patterns of leisure; and the family's verbal art. In the first section, Chapter II gives a brief description of the history and geography of the region where the family community is located. Chapter III focuses on the present family group. It traces the development of their concepts of family and community and looks at their social interaction as a family.

The second section has one chapter dealing with family pastimes. Pastimes are examined as an important part of family entertainment and as sources of and settings for verbal performance. This chapter also looks at the ways family identities are manipulated in these settings.

In the third section, four chapters focus on the family's verbal art. Chapter V considers patterns of performance: the style of particular storytellers, the storyteller's point of view, the interactions of performer and audience, and the uses of verbal art in family settings. Chapters VI and VII present a topical analysis of verbal art in the family to show how family members present themselves both as individuals and as groups in their stories. The final chapter examines the traditions surrounding three family characters. It focuses on the similarities and differences between traditions which have remained, for the most part, within the family and those which have spread to the surrounding area.

This study, then, examines the esoteric traditions of one family network, focusing primarily on the verbal art and social interaction in leisure time of its members. The patterns of expressive behavior I describe are not those which I consider to be unique to this family; rather, they are those which seemed to be most characteristic of the family as I have known it and as I found it during my research. I have not made comparisons to other family studies, except in a few cases, nor have I drawn any general principles which might be applied to other families. I am confident, however, that many of my conclusions and the patterns I describe will apply to other families as well.

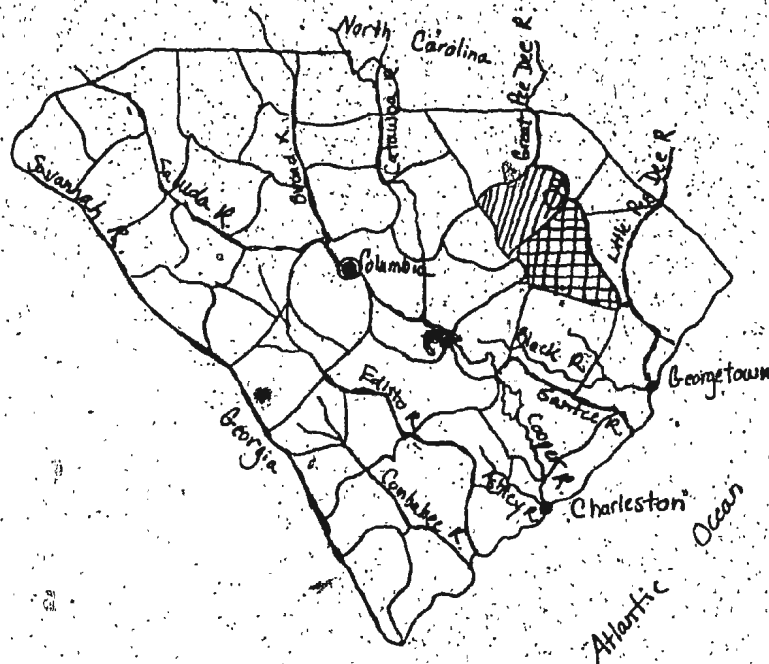


Fig. 1 Map showing location of Darlington and Florence Counties in South Carolina

Legend

- state capitol
- towns
- ▨ Darlington County
- ▩ Florence County

CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY OF THE UPPER PEE DEE

This study focuses on a rural community embracing parts of Darlington and Florence Counties in the upper Pee Dee River Basin in northeastern South Carolina. Historically, it is a sedentary community, and many ancestors of the present family were among the first permanent white settlers to arrive there in the early to mid 1700s. To establish a background against which to view the family and its community, this chapter presents an overview of the culture and geography of the region and of the major historical changes since the earliest settlement by Europeans.

The Midlands

In 1926 Joseph Morse wrote:

South Carolina, like a certain Roman province made famous by Julius Caesar, is divided geologically and topographically into three parts, significantly designated as low, middle, and up country. It may therefore be said to be a state of three attitudes, three climates, three soils; and since these largely determine the economic and industrial activities of the inhabitants, which in turn shape and color their history, their character and culture, we may add, three peoples.¹

¹ Joseph Morse, "A Social Interpretation: South Carolina," Social Forces, 4 (1926), 690.

The family community is located in the Midlands, which lies below the fall line between the Upcountry and the Lowcountry. Although it has more in common with the Lowcountry than the Upcountry -- in fact, today many persons do not use the name Midlands and refer to all land below the fall land as Lowcountry -- the Midlands combines some of the distinctive features of both regions.

The Lowcountry embraces the tidelands and the lower pine belt of the coastal plains. The flat fertile tidelands were ideal for growing rice, indigo, and cotton, making this an area of large plantations in the years before the Civil War. Most of the early settlers of the Lowcountry came directly from their original homelands or by way of the West Indies and landed in Charleston, which was one of the largest port cities on the east coast at that time. They were primarily British and French Huguenot settlers, who soon acquired or brought with them, African slaves. Settling close to the coastal ports, they remained European-oriented, the wealthiest planters and merchants often sending their children to be educated in England.

The Upcountry includes the red hills of the piedmont and began as a land of small subsistence farmers. The area was settled primarily by Scotch-Irish and German people who came overland from the northern colonies. Isolated from the major flows of traffic and transportation, these people were forced to produce at home most of the goods they needed. After the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793, the cotton plantation and system of slavery which supported it gradually spread into the Upcountry, but this region's plantations never reached the size of those in the Lowcountry.

The swift streams of the Piedmont offered a source of power for cotton mills, and made this region an excellent location for industry. Many of the largest industrial towns developed at the fall line, where the coastal plain abuts the Piedmont plateau, for there the normal upper limit of river transportation coincided with the most easily developed water power.

The Midlands includes the upper pine belt and the sandhills. The slightly undulating terrain of this region has better drainage than the flat Lowcountry, making it an excellent region for agriculture. The soils, frequently a sandy loam underlain with clay, are generally fertile except in the sand hills. Tall pines characterize the sandy high land, while hardwoods often dominate the river flood plains and other wetter soils. Swift "black-water" streams rise in the sandhills and flow through the area pouring into slower-moving "red rivers" flowing out of the Piedmont. The flood plain of the "red rivers" are characterized by a fine silt loam soil, very productive of timber and of farm crops if protected by dikes from the frequent "freshets." It was on the high land along the banks of these rivers that the first settlements by Europeans were made in the region.

Early Settlement

Until the 1730s this area of the Carolina colony was unsettled back country. To attract white settlers, the colonial government, around 1730, established along the rivers of the colony eleven townships of about 20,000 acres each. A portion of Queensborough Township

plus a large additional acreage on the Pee Dee River were soon occupied by a group of Welsh Baptists from Newcastle County, Pennsylvania, who had petitioned the government for land.

These Welsh settlers began arriving in 1735. Later they moved further up the river to a site later called the Welsh Neck, eventually establishing a permanent settlement across the river in the present community of Society Hill. This permanent settlement lay within the boundaries of what later became Darlington County, the county with which this study is chiefly concerned.²

Once well established, the Welsh settlement was soon augmented by an influx of new settlers: English, Scots, Irish, Scotch-Irish, French Huguenot, and German. These settlers came either directly from their homelands and up the river by way of the coastal ports, or overland from the northern colonies. The tide of emigration slowed during the period just before the Revolution and gradually picked up again after peace was established.³

These early settlers were primarily farmers. They planted wheat and corn but derived their main income from trading horses, cattle, and hogs, which were driven either to the coastal ports or to northern markets. The foundations of a plantation society were started with the cultivation of indigo, which was found to grow well on the rich alluvial land along the Pee Dee River, and the number of slaves increased as Midland farmers

² Alexander Gregg, History of the Old Cheraws (Columbia, S.C.: The State Company, 1925), pp. 43-51; Horace Fraser Rudisill, "A Brief History of Darlington County, South Carolina," in Historical Tours of Darlington County (Darlington, S.C.: Darlington County Tricentennial Committee, 1970), p. 5.

³ Gregg, pp. 109-112.

prospered by exporting their products to England. Lumber and naval stores (pitch, tar, and turpentine) also became important exports. The pine forests of the Upper Pee Dee were a major source of these products, which were in great demand by the British shipping industry.

With the Revolution came the virtual end of the indigo trade. Farmers were forced to return to general agriculture. Then came cotton, slowly at first, but with Eli Whitney's ginning process introduced in 1793, a rapid development of the plantation system and the one-crop economy followed.

During this early period of settlement in the Upper Pee Dee, the river was the main highway to the coastal ports. As early as 1746, the Pee Dee River was open for navigation from Cheraw, a community about fifteen miles up the river from the Welsh settlement, down to the coast. Some of the settlers became traders, using pole boats and later steamboats to transport goods to the coastal markets. The two main highways in the area, still used today, were the Georgetown Road, or "River Road," which followed the Pee Dee River to Georgetown, and the Charleston Stagecoach Road, which ran parallel to it before branching off toward Charleston. The river boats, however, continued to be the main form of commercial transportation even after the Civil War, until their business was taken over by the railroads.⁴

The Midland area had much in common with both the Upcountry and the Lowcountry, but it developed closer ties to the Lowcountry. Like the Lowcountry, the Midlands developed a plantation economy, but on a smaller, less pretentious scale, and depended on an export market for their products.

⁴ Gregg, pp. 109-112

Midlanders, especially those who settled along the rivers, felt a close affinity with Lowcountry culture.

At the same time, Midlanders feel that their region is separate and distinctive. They make fun of the Charlestonians' pretensions to aristocracy, and express pride in their own ancestors who came down "The Great Wagon Road" from the northern colonies, many of them penniless and illiterate, as well as in those, often wealthier and better educated, who came by way of the coastal ports. Midland people still point out proudly that many of their towns, such as Lancaster, were named for towns in Pennsylvania or Virginia rather than towns in England.

The Counties

The family community lies in what was once the Darlington District, but now comprises parts of two counties, Darlington and Florence. A succession of political subdivisions embraced the territory that finally formed the present counties of Darlington and Florence. What is now Darlington County was once part of Craven County, a subdivision of the Carolina Colony which had few political functions; there was no county government, county officers, or county seat. There followed a series of divisions into parishes.

The back country settlements, which had little representation under this system, grew increasingly hostile toward Lowcountry authority. The only court of criminal and civil jurisdiction in the colony was in Charleston. The Upper Pee Dee had no representatives in the Provincial Assembly. Finally, under pressure from these settlers, who formed a group of "Regulators" to enforce their own laws, the government, in 1768, divided the

province into seven judicial districts by "An Act for establishing Courts, building Goals, and Appointing Sheriffs and other officers, for the more convenient administration of Justice in this province." One of these districts was the "Cheraws District," which was subdivided in 1785 into three counties: Chesterfield, Darlington, and Malborough. By an act of 1798 these counties were made district and the Cheraws District ceased to function.⁵

The Welsh settlement at Society Hill was the location of the court house for the Cheraws District. With the subdivision of the district into counties, new sites for the court houses had to be established. No one knows for certain how the site for the Darlington County Court House was chosen, but a local legend has it that Lamuel Benton and Elias DuBose, both ancestors of most members of the family, chose it through a compromise. Benton wanted it located at Mechanicsville, where he lived, and DuBose wanted it built in his home community, Cuffey Town. The two men agreed to leave home on horseback at a given time and ride toward each other at a moderate gait. The spot where they met would be the site for the court house. Thus, in 1785, the site of the Darlington Court House was established about 10 miles from the river, midway between the two communities.

Whether or not the legend is true, the location of the county seat was significant in the development of the river communities. The town of Darlington which grew up around the court house became the early center

⁵ Gregg, p. 37 and pp. 121-182; A.S. Salley, "Formation of Darlington County," in Darlingtoniana: A History of People, Places and Events in Darlington County, South Carolina, eds. Eliza Cowan Ervin and Horace Fraser Rudisill (Darlington, S.C.: Darlington County Historical Society, 1964), pp. 6-11.

of trade, commerce, and political organization for the county, and the outlying communities remained primarily rural.

In 1889, the southern portion of Darlington County was cut off to form part of the newly-created Florence County, and in 1902, another portion was cut off to form the county of Lee. Darlington County now covers an area of about 600 square miles, bounded on the east by the Pee Dee River and on the west by Lynches River. Approximately 62% of this is forestland. It has a total population of 55,000+.⁶ There are four small towns: Darlington (pop. 7,000+), Hartsville (pop. 8,000+), Lamar (1,250+), and Society Hill (pop. 800+). The remainder of the county is rural.

With an average growing season of 241 days, an annual rainfall of about 43 inches, a fertile soil in most areas, and good drainage, the county has excellent conditions for an agricultural economy. Presently ranking fourth in total cash receipts from crop sales, it is considered one of the most productive farming counties in the state.

Florence (pop. 26,000+), 10 miles south of Darlington and the largest town in the Pee Dee region, began in the 1850s as a railroad junction, which the people of Darlington refused to have within their town.⁷ Its role as the commercial and transportation center of the region was enhanced by the Interstate Highway program. It is the halfway point on I-95 between New York City and Miami, Florida, and is the eastern terminus of I-26.

⁶ Industrial Resources and Opportunity: Darlington County, Prepared by Darlington County Development Board and South Carolina State Development Board, April 1974.

⁷ 1970 census.

The Ante-Bellum Period

South Carolina in the 19th century was dominated by a planter-slave society and a one-crop economy. A great economic expansion occurred as cotton plantations spread over the state, and the conflicts and distinctions between Lowcountry and Upcountry were reduced. In spite of the large population increase from 1790 to 1850, the average farm size rose from 310 acres to 541 acres.⁸ David Duncan Wallace described the economic ideal of the state in this period:

The economic ideal of South Carolina up to 1860 remained the same as that adopted with the dominance of rice in the 18th century: a staple agricultural product raised in great quantities by slave gangs, a domestic transportation system to bring it to port, direct foreign trade in this commodity, with which the utilities of civilized existence were to be purchased from outside. The glorification of agriculture as morally superior to other industries discouraged the development of varied possibilities and contributed to the strengths and weaknesses of an aristocratic planter-dominated society.

Farmers in the Upper Pee Dee continued to rely almost entirely on cotton. Those whose ancestors had settled the rich land along the river accumulated more land, planted more cotton, and enjoyed a period of prosperity. To escape the malarial river lands, these planters built summer homes away from the river and became absentee landlords for part of the year, much as the Lowcountry rice planters had done. In Darlington County the high sandy banks of Black Creek became the site of a summer community for planter families. Other favorite vacation spots were the health

⁸ David Duncan Wallace, South Carolina: A Short History, 1520-1948 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1961), p. 445.

⁹ Wallace, p. 445.

spring resorts in North Carolina and Virginia. Plantation neighbors were often neighbors in summer communities, and the ties between the families were further strengthened by frequent intermarriages.

Between the Wars, 1865-1939

With the War Between the States, the plantation system and the prosperity of those who owned plantations, ended. The war left the economy in ruins, many landowners losing their homes and land. Those who did manage to save their plantations found it difficult to maintain them after the war was over. Eventually, the planter-slave system was replaced by a planter-sharecropper-tenant system. This system, the damages of war, the turbulent years of Reconstruction, and the nationwide depression of 1873 greatly retarded South Carolina's economic growth.

Radical Reconstruction rule ended in 1877, and the state slowly recovered as the government began encouraging agricultural production. By 1900 farmers were once again enjoying a period of relative prosperity. South Carolina agriculture began to move toward diversification, but "King Cotton" still dominated the farm economy. The price of cotton rose sharply, reaching a peak during World War I. Many farmers mortgaged their farms to buy more land to grow more cotton. But in 1921 the bottom dropped out. Cotton went from 40 cents to 6 cents in a matter of weeks, leaving most farmers deeply in debt, many bankrupt. That was also the year the boll weevil reached South Carolina.

Throughout the South, many farmers were ruined before the Great Depression of the 1930s arrived. It is said that in 1932 90% of the farms in Darlington County were mortgaged for more than they could be

sold for. Adding to the woes caused by the boll weevil and depressed prices, disastrous weather nearly ruined the 1928 and 1929 crops.

The short-lived prosperity of the early 1900s is recalled by many today as Darlington County's heyday. The high prices of cotton gave many families ready cash, which they had never had before. Darlington had two hotels, as well as an opera house, which housed operas and plays from New York and theatre productions by local groups. Formal "balls" and concerts were popular. Seashore and mountain resorts became popular vacation spots for local farm and town people. Darlington County was in "high cotton."

Things slowed down with the low farm prices of the 1920s and the Depression of the 30s. Social life centered more on family and community activities rather than on formal entertainment from outside. But old ways persisted, and people in the area seem to agree with Ernest Lander's conclusion that there was little change in South Carolina between the Civil War and World War II:

Except for the end of Reconstruction (1877) there was little significant break or change in South Carolina history from the end of the Civil War until the outbreak of World War II. Neither the advent of Benjamin R. Tillman nor the Spanish-American War, the coming of Coleman L. Blease nor World War I, produced any permanent or deep-seated change in South Carolina's one-party politics and cotton economy. Nor did South Carolina's educational and religious institutions, white or black, undergo any drastic innovations. Since 1941, however, the usual pattern of agriculture, industry, education, race relations, and even one-party politics have been greatly, and sometimes severely, altered.

¹⁰ Ernest M. Lander, Jr., A History of South Carolina, 1865-1960, 2nd ed. (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1970); pp. vii-viii.

From World War II to the Present

After World War II the area began to change as transportation and economy improved and people became more mobile. Local industry grew, and the number of farms declined. Cotton became less important as a cash crop as more tobacco, corn, and soybeans were planted. Tenancy and sharecropping also declined as farm workers went to work in town or migrated to northern cities. Today, the region of the South and the Upper Pee Dee subregion have become closer to the rest of the country, although they still retain some of the cultural patterns which distinguish them.

This brief description of the history of the Upper Pee Dee should provide a background for understanding the present-day family members whose ancestors settled in the area. The following chapter will look at some of the historical changes from the point of view of the family to see how the lives of its members were affected by these changes.

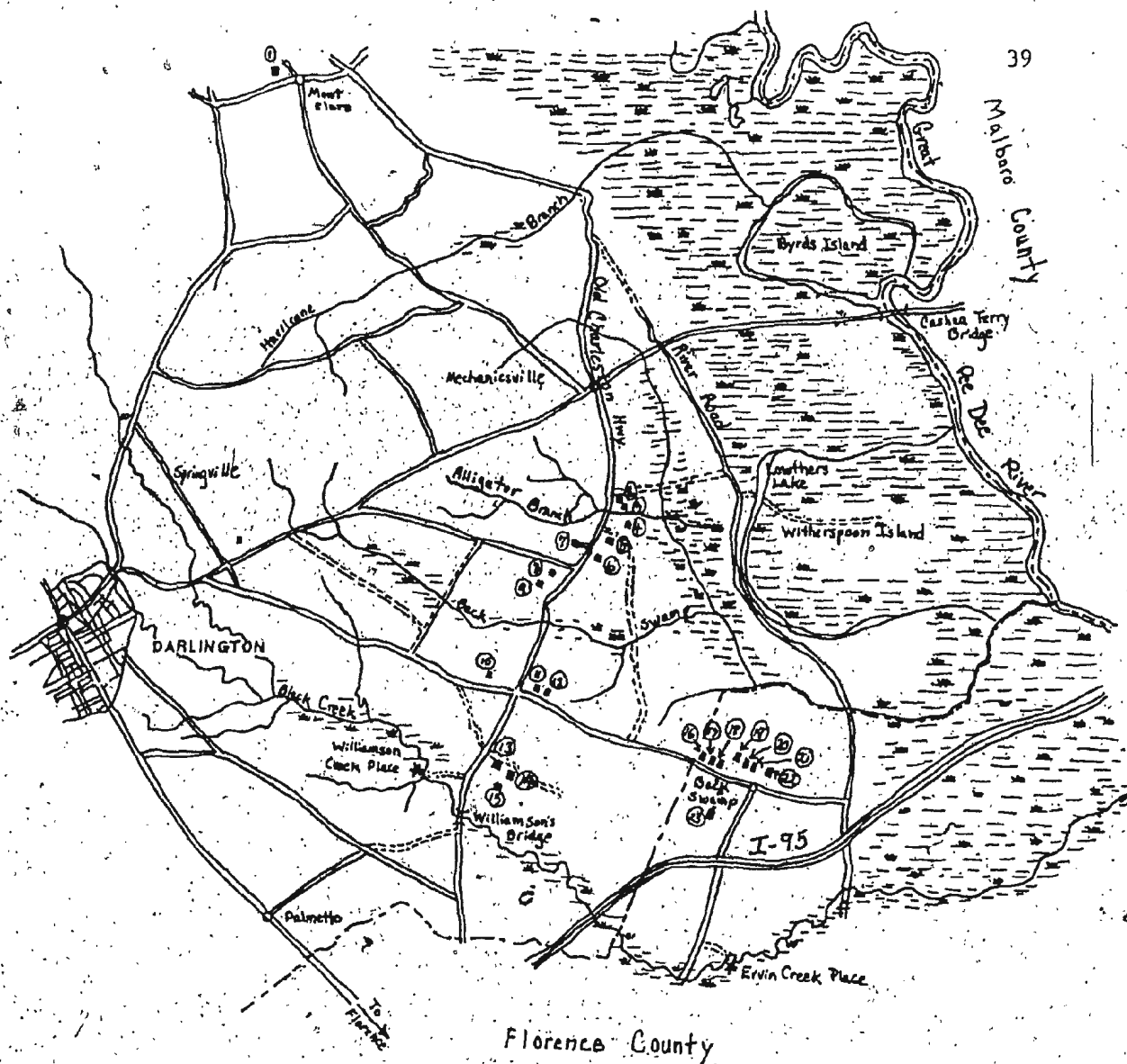


Fig. 2 Map of Community and Surrounding Area

Legend

- ① county seat
- community
- == paved road
- - - primitive road
- - - county line
- dwelling
- * creek place
- low marsh land

Scale: 1" = 2 mi.

Dwellings

- ① McIver Williamson
- ② Hugh and Wilma Dargan
- ③ Tug and Bubba Dargan
- ④ Tim and Caroline Dargan
- ⑤ Ervin and Esther Dargan
- ⑥ Ned and Cullough Dargan
- ⑦ Lucas and Frances Dargan
- ⑧ Jimmy and Nancy Brown
(parents of Robbie Dargan)
- ⑨ Edwin and Robbie Dargan
- ⑩ Bill and Juanita Howard
- ⑪ Jolly and Annie Louise
Howard
- ⑫ Armstrong Howard
- ⑬ Frank and Sarah Williamson
- ⑭ proposed site of Keith
and Caroline Williamson
- ⑮ Ben and Ann Williamson
- ⑯ Martha Ervin
- ⑰ Sam and Ludie Ervin
- ⑱ Jake and Susann Ervin
- ⑲ Van and Margaret Ervin
- ⑳ Margaret and Ida Ervin
- ㉑ Henry and Ily Jeffers
- ㉒ Jack and Ecy Jeffers
- ㉓ Mary Katherine Ervin

CHAPTER III

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Although this study concentrates on the present, by the very nature of the family's own awareness of itself, it must also look at the past. The biographies of many families involve tracing the descendants of a notable male ancestor. Unlike such family biographical histories, this study is not limited to the descendants of a common ancestor, nor is its main concern only those ancestors who made an important mark on history. It begins, instead, with a present-day group which considers itself a family and goes back to its various origins to show how the present concepts of family developed.

Through interviews with family members, as well as checking written sources, I have attempted to reconstruct the family history, taking into account how family members' attitudes toward the past affect their recollection of it. This chapter also looks at the family today: its economic structure, religion, education, values, and concepts of family and community. This should provide a background for understanding how the family's verbal art and pastimes are related to other areas of its members' lives.

Family and Community

The greatest concentration of family members form a rural

community of about 10,000 acres near the Pea Dee River in the eastern part of Darlington County and a small adjoining portion of Florence County. For them, family and community are interrelated, and the shapes of both have been continually changing over the years as the kinship ties between families have changed and as land has been bought and sold. Until World War II, modes of transportation in the region were slow, leaving rural communities fairly isolated. Neighbors tended to marry on their own social and economic level. With each generation new relationships and stronger ties were established between the families who settled and remained near the river.

The present boundaries of the community intersect the edges of three rural school districts: Mechanicsville and Palmetto in Darlington County and Back Swamp in Florence County. These district boundaries have little meaning today and are used only as voting districts. At one time they coincided with the boundaries of viable rural communities, which had their own schools, churches, and post offices. The post offices closed with the introduction of rural free delivery. They were followed by the consolidation of the schools. By the late 1940s most of the rural schools were closed, and children were bused to the schools in the towns. In the 1800s and early 1900s the schools brought community residents together with candy pullings, plays, dances, and other social events. Thus, the consolidation of the schools removed an important social center from the rural communities.

The churches also were important social as well as religious centers. The Back Swamp Church had an active interdenominational congregation until it closed in the 1940s. An 1804 plat shows a

church in Palmetto about which nothing is known. Residents of Palmetto have gone to church in the town of Darlington for as long as they can remember. The Mechanicsville Baptist Church is still active, but family members living in this district go to the Episcopal Church in Darlington. They are not involved, therefore, with the church-centered social activities of the Mechanicsville Community.

With the loss of these institutions and with the increasing ties of kinship between families across the old community lines, the social life of the families along the river became increasingly family-based and their concept of community, family-centered. Today, these families define their community not by district boundaries but rather by the boundaries of family-owned land. These boundaries encompass the adjoining farms of twenty households clustered in enclaves of last-name family groups: Ervins, Jeffers, Dargans, Howards, and Williamsons.

Over the generations these families have intermarried, so that today the kinship ties between most persons in the community is no more distant than second cousins. Some are more distantly related, but because they live in the area and are "close-kin" to the same people, they are considered by all to be part of the close network of kin. For example, some members of the community are my fourth cousins, but because they are second cousins to my second cousins and live in the community, I consider them to be part of my close family group.

Marriage between second and third cousins has been common over the generations, and there have been a few cases of first cousins marrying. The frequency of intermarriage and double-first cousin

relationships makes the web of kinship extremely complex. As a result, there is often no clear distinction made between the paternal and maternal sides of an individual's family, since both may be a part of the larger family group.

Consider my own situation. My parents are second cousins once removed;¹ therefore, I have great-great-great grandparents on my father's side, who are great-great grandparents on my mother's side. That makes my father my third cousin and my mother my second cousin twice removed. My mother's sister married my father's brother, so I have double-first cousins who are also my third cousins once removed. And, depending on which line I am tracing, Johannes and Sarah Kolb are my five-greats, my six-greats, or my seven-greats grandparents.

This, of course, is making kinship reckoning more complicated than it has to be. Generally, only the closest line of kinship is recognized and used in family relations. But, just for the fun of it, family members often enjoy figuring out all the many ways they are kin. I once found my father telling the boy with whom I was about to leave for a party that he and I were related seven different ways, none of them closer than fourth.

The complicated nature of kinship ties in the community is not uncommon in the region. Ben Robertson described a similar pattern in his Upcountry South Carolina family, who lived about 200 miles northwest of this community:

Our kinships were so interbound that we seldom spoke of our family tree as a tree; we called it a wheel, for no

¹ "Once removed" indicates a generation difference.

matter in which direction you traced, you always sooner or later came back to the patriarch from whom you started.²

The community is the central group of a larger family network, including many relatives now living outside the area but who once lived, or whose parents or grandparents lived, in the community and who have maintained close ties. Each family in the community also has many other family connections, some quite close, outside the community-based group. Thus, while the community is defined by family ties, the range of recognized kin extends beyond the borders of family land.

Although all members of the community have at least two common ancestors (Sarah and Johannes Kolb, who arrived in the area from Pennsylvania in the early 1700s), this line of common descent has little to do with who belongs to the family. All descendants of this couple are not recognized as kin, nor is everyone aware of their common ancestry. Their sense of family is based more on a closer blood kinship. Everyone in the community is closely related to many of the others through either the Ervins or the Dargans, and many are closely related to all others because of intermarriage between the two families in the late 1800s.

Residence in the community, friendship, and participation in family activities also play an important role in establishing a sense of family identity. The importance of these criteria in the recognition of kinship was summed up by one family member in describing his use of

² Ben Robertson, Red Hills and Cotton: An Upcountry Memory (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), p. 44.

the term "cousin:"

I was brought up to call a lot of people "Cousin." I always called Miss Nellie Murphy, "Cousin Nellie," and I thought of her children, who were my third cousins, as cousins. I guess third cousin is generally as far as we'd recognize cousins. But then it depends on whether they live close to you, or whether they are close to you, close friends. That makes a lot of difference. Well, some people you call "Cousin" whether they're kin to you or not. And some [laughs] you wouldn't call "Cousin" even if they're your first cousin.

(FNI)

Within the community family members have other ways of grouping their kin, using some or all of these criteria. Some of the important distinctions made are between nuclear families, extended families in which nuclear family relationships are extended through three or four generations, families identified by their sharing the same last name, a distinction between maternal and paternal branches of the family, and the special sense of family which often develops when siblings of one family marry siblings of another. "Family" also includes some persons who are not blood relatives but who are given honorary kin titles, such as "Aunt," "Uncle," and "Cousin." In conversation, individuals may distinguish between these family groups with phrases such as, "my immediate family," "my McIver cousins," "the Dargan-Ervin clan," or "the Evander Ervins," but often the only way to discover the referential meaning of the terms "family" and "cousin" is to examine the situations in which they are used.

Until recent years, one sense of family included the black families who had ties to family land, having worked it first as slaves and later as tenants or sharecroppers. Members of these families who were considered especially close to the white families were frequently called by the

kinship titles, "Aunt" and "Uncle," a common practice in the South. Like white members of the family, they lived on family land and participated in the work and leisure activities of the family. Their roles, however, and the obligations entailed were obviously quite different from those of white family members. They did not own their land, and at family gatherings their jobs were to cook, clean, build fires, paddle boats, and nurse young children. Blacks and whites were expected to interact socially on certain occasions, but not to overstep the bounds of these established roles.

Older generations of the family insist that these black persons were "part of the family," and many of their stories are told to emphasize the strength of this relationship. It was difficult to arrive at a clear understanding of the exact nature of this relationship, using both points of view, as virtually all the older black members of the community are gone. I have not, therefore, included such material in this study, nor have I gone any further in my discussion of this relationship. This would require a study in itself.

There are also many relatives with whom family members recognize kinship who have no connection to the community. This includes relatives living in neighboring towns and in other parts of the country. While they may not interact as frequently as members of the close family groups, they are still recognized as kin.

An even larger sense of family lies in the recognition of an almost limitless network of kin, not only those relatives whom members of the family know, but also those whom they might meet. Strangers are often asked such questions as, "Where are your people from?" or

"Are you one of the Murphys from Murphy Town?" The discovery of remote kinship may then be met with a handshake and "Welcome to the family." Although such a remark is not entirely serious, since distant cousins are seldom brought into the close family circle, the recognition of kinship is genuine, and often lasting friendships develop.

Each of these concepts of family group involves different sets of mutual obligations and responsibilities, different degrees of intimacy, affection, and identification. Although I have concentrated primarily on the family network centered in the community, other family ties inevitably play a part in family relations in the community.

The present concept of family group in the community developed only in the last generation, although it had its beginnings much earlier. Inter marriages between the last-name families over the years has changed the shapes of the family and the community. Gradually what were once separate families and separate communities became one family and one community, although last-name families still maintain their separate identities apart from the group. Today, the family community includes five last-name groups : Dargans, Ervins, Jeffers, Howards, and Williams.

The Jeffers, however, do not seem to have a separate identity in the community; they are generally referred to as "Ervin cousins" and, for this reason, will not be considered separately in this study. Two Jeffers brothers from Florence married Ervin sisters and settled on Ervin land in the early 1940s. This, and the fact that the rest of the family is related to the Jeffers children through the Ervins may

explain why they are considered Ervins.

In a few more generations, the Jeffers may be considered a separate group as the name becomes associated with the community. This happened with the Howard family, who are also related to the rest of the family through the Ervins. Two Howard brothers married Ervin sisters in the late 1800s. One of the couples bought land in the community, and the other remained on the Howard farm in another part of Florence County. The children of these couples were called "Ervin cousins" by relatives in the community who were their contemporaries, while by the next generation they and their descendants were identified as "Howard cousins." Unlike the Jeffers, the Howards are seen as distinct from the Ervins, with their own traits and characteristics, which other family members delight in weaving into stories about them.

The boundaries of the community have changed as the makeup of the family network has changed. In the late 1800s, Palmetto, Back Swamp, and Mechanicsville were distinct communities. Although the Dargans, Ervins, and Williamsons did visit and meet at social occasions, they did not interact so much as a family even though they were distantly related. Frank Williamson said that when he was growing up in the early 1900s, his family was closer to their James and McIver cousins in the Palmetto Community; but by the end of World War II most members of those families had moved out of the community. When he married Sarah Dargan (his second cousin once removed through the Ervins and McIvers), he became a part of the Dargan-Ervin family network, and the boundaries of their community were extended to include

the Williamson land.

The Dargan and Ervin land had already been joined as a community in the early 1900s when an Ervin brother and sister married a Dargan sister and brother. More land was added to this in the early 1900s when another Ervin sister married a Howard and bought a farm in the community. Then, after World War II, two Dargan brothers bought land joining their farm with the Howard farm, making the community one continuous block of family-owned land. Since then, a large portion of Dargan land has been sold to an agricultural experiment station, but this sale brought no new residents to the community.

Although all members of the family would not agree on the exact limits of the community -- some would even argue that there are no definite boundaries -- most agree that the edges of family-owned land in this continuous block give the community its shape. It is generally bounded on the east by the Pee Dee River and on the south by Black Creek. The land is level except where it dips toward the wetter soils along the branches and the creek. About a mile beyond the Ervin farms, it drops abruptly forming the high banks above Lowther's Lake, an oxbow lake on the river, then stretches out for about three miles of river swamp. (See Figure 2, p. 39)

The family houses stand along two roads, the Pocket Road and the Old Charleston Highway, which intersect as they run through the community. Although last-name families own land in different parts of the community, sometimes jointly with other families, they tend to build their homes together. Five of the seven Dargan houses stand between Back Swamp and Alligator Branch. The other two are located "across the branch," on the

opposite hill. The three Howard houses are near the crossroads of the Old Charleston Highway and the Pocket Road. Further down Pocket Road toward the river, eight Ervin and Jeffers houses are set back in the woods from the road. Two Williamson houses stand close together midway between the crossroads and Black Creek, and a third will soon be built between them.

This area is defined as a community by the family's own sense of its boundaries. It has no name. When referring to it in conversation, family members usually say "our community" or "this neighborhood out here." In addition to family ties and family ownership of land, the geography of the area has influenced how they perceive the community's dimensions.

Before modern transportation made travel easy, residents of the area could not travel more than ten to fifteen miles in a day. For the communities along the Pee Dee River, the river and its bordering swamplands were a decided barrier. Travel was generally toward the west, away from the river rather than across it. The pole ferry which crossed the river at Mechanicsville was discontinued in the early 1930s. Not until 1947 was it replaced by a bridge. Joe Dargan, born in 1893, used to declare that he had crossed the Atlantic Ocean eight times (World War I navy duty) before he ever crossed the Pee Dee River.

Since the family community lies on the edges of two counties, social and business activities have been directed toward the county seats. In spite of vacations to the mountains and to the coast and visits to neighboring towns, however, the community remained fairly isolated until after World War II. The Old Charleston Highway was

not paved until the mid 1950s, and trips to the county seat tended to be a once-a-week, usually Saturday, occasion.

The family community is not a community according to the political subdivisions of the county; nor would it be classified as a community using the anthropological definition of the term, since it does not include all who live within its spatial boundaries. It is not a self-contained unit. Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball have argued that the only true form of community in the South is the county:

The distinctive community form of the South was and is the county. Dispersed a day's ride in and out around the county seat, that community assembled planter and field- or house-hand from the fat plantations, free poor white or Negro from the lean hills and swamps, for the pageantry and the drama of Saturdays around the courthouse, when the courthouse, the jail, the registry of deeds, and the courthouse square of shops and lawyers' row made a physical center of the far-flung community.... It is a mistake to treat this county and county seat for its separate parts and to try to find the community in the Old South at any other level. The poor white or Negro hamlets about a country church, set in hill or swamp retreat, the plantation, however large and proud and populous, the county seat as town (older ones seldom had distinctive organs apart from their function as county seat), were and are none of them complete communities. The county itself was the unit of dispersal and assemblage, and it was a two-class community from its inception in the gathering-in of nobles into the king's palace and capital along with noblesse de robe and rich bourgeois.³

Although the traditional gathering of the rural population in the county seat on Saturdays is not the occasion it once was, the county remains the only political unit, and the county seat is still where the family goes to shop and to do business. The family community is

³ Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, Culture and Community (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), pp. 106-107.

considered a unit here primarily because this is how the family perceives it.

Family Histories

A brief description of the genealogical background of each last-name family in the community (the Jeffers are excluded for reasons mentioned earlier) should give a clearer idea of how these families developed their present concept of family group. Each family has a large collection of family charts, Bibles, wills, deeds, and letters to document the family's past, and a great deal of information is also passed down through stories and the recollections of older generations. Recent generations have taken more care to record the memories of their parents and grandparents, adding these to the store of written materials on family history. For each family there are one or two persons considered the main guardians of family documents and the authorities on family history, but usually when new charts are made or new documents discovered, copies are given to all family households.

The history of the Williamson family is well-documented, but very little family history has passed down orally to succeeding generations. Frank Williamson blamed this on the characteristic reticence of the family and remarked, "The Williamsons don't tell you anything, not even family history." Recent generations of the family have become interested in learning more about their past, however, and have made an effort to piece together the family history through documents such as wills, deeds, letters, and diaries. Some of this information was

compiled by two members of a Texas branch of the family in 1949.⁴

They obtained most of their information on the Williamsons who settled in South Carolina from Bright Williamson II (1861-1927) in Darlington, who wrote:

The Williamsons came from Drewery's Bluff on the James River, Chesterfield County, Virginia, and settled on Black Creek about seven miles east of the town of Darlington, South Carolina, about 1750. There are no accounts or records of those who came from Virginia or their Christian names.

Until recently, this was all the family knew of the migration of the first Williamsons from Virginia to South Carolina. They knew that the family left Virginia in 1750 and arrived in South Carolina around 1769, but there was a nineteen-year gap which they could not explain. Then Horace Fraser Rudisill, a local historian, found a family will in which a son was left a tract of land in Bear Creek, North Carolina, and from that they deduced that the family had followed the fall line from Virginia, settled for several years in North Carolina, then moved further down to the land on Black Creek in South Carolina.

Bright Williamson II was generally considered the family historian and was responsible for recording much of the family history which followed the arrival of the first Williamson ancestors to the area. In an appendix to a local history, he wrote that a son of the first

⁴ H.H. and W.N. Williamson, "The Name and Family of Williamson and Descendants of Thomas Williamson (1745-1804) of South Carolina" (Washington, D.C. and Lubbock, Texas: Privately printed MS, May 15, 1949).

⁵ Williamson, Name, p. 6.

family of Williamsons, Thomas (1750-1804), had a son, Bright (1778-1854), who acquired more land on Black Creek in the early 1800s and built a house about a quarter a mile northeast of Williamson's Bridge. There he conducted a general mercantile business, running a line of pole boats from Georgetown, up the Pee Dee River and up Black Creek to a point just above the bridge.⁶ An account book for the store dating back to 1804 records the sale of such items as beaver hats, slippers, food products, and hardware.

With the earnings from this business, Bright was able to buy more land and eventually assembled the 2,300 acres which comprise the present Williamson farm, "Oaklyn Plantation." In 1817, he bought land six miles north of Oaklyn in what is now the Mont Clare Community, and the next year he acquired an adjoining tract, including the house he lived in for the rest of his life.⁷

Bright gave his oldest son, Benjamin Franklin Williamson (1814-1887), a half-interest in Oaklyn and a half-interest in a plantation on the Pee Dee River, which Benjamin later traded for the other half of Oaklyn. Benjamin built the house at Oaklyn where his descendants live today and began improving the land for farming. His son, Bright II described the Williamson farm in a brief sketch for a local history:

The plantation was entirely self-sustaining and independent of the outside world, except for salt, coffee, clothing, shoes, drugs, iron, and a few other articles. An abundance of

⁶ Bright Williamson, "Appendix II," in Rambles in the Pee Dee Basin, South Carolina, by Harvey Toliver Cook (Columbia, S.C.: The State Co., 1926), p. 443.

⁷ Williamson, Appendix, p. 443.

everything that could be grown under our sun and clime was produced. Most of the agricultural implements were made on the farm, and wagons were repaired and rebuilt until they lasted for twenty years.⁸

Experimenting with new agricultural methods has long been a tradition in the Williamson family. Besides his general farming interests, Benjamin Franklin Williamson experimented with improving seed. He produced an excellent variety of cotton before the War Between the States and a variety of corn, now known as "Williamson corn." His efforts to improve agriculture through scientific methods were carried on by the three sons by his second marriage, to Margaret McIver. The oldest, Bright Williamson II, primarily a banker but with substantial farm land holdings, worked for legislation to benefit farmers and experimented with boll weevil control. "He was a farmer at heart," said his nephew, Frank Williamson.

The second son, E. McIver Williamson, farmed the Mont Clare place and became known throughout the South for his innovative farming, including plant breeding and improved farming methods.⁹ Benjamin Franklin Williamson II, the third son, farmed Oaklyn and was a pioneer in the production of tobacco in the area.¹⁰ His son, Frank, farms

⁸ Harvey Toliver Cook, The Life and Legacy of David Rogerson Williams (New York: n.p., 1916), p. 302.

⁹ There are numerous articles on E. McIver Williamson's contributions to agriculture. The best summary of his corn method is, "Successful Corn Culture by Williamson Method," The Constitution (Atlanta, Ga.), 19 Feb. 1909, p.9.

¹⁰ "Mr. Williamson Pioneer in Tobacco in Area," News and Press (Darlington, S.C.), 3 Aug. 1961, p. 6A.

Oaklyn today with his sons, Ben and Keith, and also has been recognized as an outstanding farm leader in the state.¹¹

The largest family in the community and the only one which has a record of its ancestors' passage to America is the Ervins. James Ervin and his wife, Elizabeth James, first came to America in 1734 with a group of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians led by John Witherspoon, himself an ancestor of most members of the family now living in the community. The group boarded the Good Intent in Belfast, Northern Ireland, were detained for fourteen days by strong winds, then spent two months at sea in stormy weather before landing in Charleston, South Carolina. Robert Witherspoon, grandson of the leader of the group, described the stormy trip in his genealogy of the Witherspoon family, dated 1780:

On the second day after we set sail my grandmother, Janet, died and was interred in the boisterous ocean, which was an affecting sight to her offspring. We were sorely tossed at sea with storms, which caused our ship to spring a leak, our pumps were kept incessantly at work day and night for many days together and our mariners seemed many times at their wits' end. But it pleased God to bring us all safe to land, except my grandmother, about the first of December.¹²

After spending four weeks in Charleston, the group boarded an open boat, carrying a year's provisions and tools for each family. They travelled northeast to Georgetown, and then followed the Black River up to a clearing below the place where they planned to locate their

¹¹ Eldrige Thompson, "Frank Williamson of Darlington Proves Self to be Farmer's Farmer," News and Courier (Charleston, S.C.), 25 Sept. 1955, n.pag.

¹² Robert Witherspoon's genealogy was dated, Williamsburg, 1780. It was quoted in, Joseph G. Wardlaw, Genealogy of the Witherspoon Family: With Some Account of Other Families with which it is connected (Yorkville, S.C.: n.p., 1910), p. 7.

settlement. Robert Witherspoon described the hardships endured by the group on their trip up the river, a description some of his descendants have heard from their parents and grandparents:

My father had heard that up the river swamp was the King's Tree, although there was no path nor did he know the distance. He followed up the meanderings of the swamp until he came to the branch and by that means he found Roger Gordon's place. We watched him as far as the trees would let us see and returned to our dolorous hut, expecting never to see him or any human being any more. But after sometime he returned with fire and we were somewhat comforted, but evening coming on the wolves began to howl on all sides. We then feared being devoured by wild beasts, as we had neither gun nor dog, nor even a door to our house, howbeit we set to and gathered fuel and made a good fire and so we passed the first night.

The next morning being clear and moderate, we began to stir about, and about midday there arose a cloud at southwest, attended with high wind, lightning and thunder. The rain quickly penetrated through the poles of the hut and brought down the sand with which it was covered and which seemed for awhile to cover us alive. The lightning and claps were very awful and lasted for a good space of time. I do not remember to have seen a much severer gust than that was. I believe we all sincerely wished to be again at Belfast.¹³

The Presbyterian group finally made its settlement on a grant of 20 square miles, which had been laid out by royal authority with full guaranty that the group could practice its religious faith without interference. The settlement was named Williamsburg in honor of William III, Prince of Orange. It was located on the site of the present town of Kingstree in Williamsburg County.¹⁴

James and Elizabeth Ervin had fourteen children. Two of their grandsons, Hugh and John, married Witherspoon sisters and moved to

¹³ Wardlaw, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴ John J. Dargan, "Addenda: History of Williamsburg County," in History of the Old Cheraws, by Alexander Gregg (Columbia, S.C.: The State Company, 1925), p. 576; Wardlaw; Ida Ervin, "My Family" (Florence, S.C.: Unpublished term paper, n.d.).

the Aimwell section of what is now Florence County. In 1812, Hugh bought a large tract of land about 15 miles northwest of Aimwell on the Pee Dee River and moved there with his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, Robert and Mary. On part of this land, many of their Ervin descendants live today.

Robert Ervin married his cousin, Elizabeth Fulton, and they had eight children. A son, Dr. Samuel Fulton Ervin (1821-1853) earned his degree in medicine, but the family farm, "Back Swamp Plantation," occupied most of his time. His practice of medicine was largely confined to his family and workers on the farm.¹⁵ He married Harriet McIver and had six sons. Two of the sons died young, and one, John Fulton Ervin, never married. He was considered a family "character," as a later chapter will show.

The oldest son of S.F. Ervin, Evander McIver Ervin, who farmed one half of the family land, married his first cousin, Margaret Louisa Penn McIver, and had ten children. His brother, Samuel Fulton Ervin II, farmed the other half, married Martha Adams and had six children. All of the Ervins living in Back Swamp today are descended from these two brothers.¹⁶

Much of the early history of the Ervins in South Carolina has been recorded by local historians,¹⁷ but the principal historian within the

¹⁵ Horace Fraser Rudisill, Doctors of Darlington County, South Carolina, 1760-1912 (Darlington, S.C.: The Darlington County Historical Society, 1962), p. 24.

¹⁶ Robert Ervin Coker, "Ervins in America, Chiefly Darlington, South Carolina, Branch" (Darlington, S.C.: Unpublished genealogical chart, 1951).

¹⁷ Henry E. Davis, "James, Ervins, Witherspoons Played Prominent Role," Florence Morning News, n.d., n.pag.; Dargan, Addenda, p. 579; Wardlaw.

family was Julia Ervin, who died in 1962 at the age of 82 leaving unfinished the history of the family which she had planned to write.

Family members recall hearing that she started as a child gathering information on the family, writing down on scraps of paper the bits of family history she heard from her parents and grandparents. Sometime after she finished school, she began doing research on the Ervins, corresponding with relatives in several parts of the country and locating family documents.

Although few of the Ervins have seen Julia's unfinished manuscript, some have copies of the documents she collected, and she passed on orally to her nieces and nephews some of the information she had gathered. Many family members know about the hardships endured by the first Ervins in America and enjoy telling how their ancestors "feared the wild animals who howled at night."

Turning to the history of the Dargans, the second largest family in the community, we find no information about when and how the family came to America. To the best of our knowledge, the first Dargan ancestors to arrive in South Carolina were Timothy (-1762) and Catherine Appleby Dargan, who left Virginia and settled, about 1750, near Orangeburg, South Carolina, about 100 miles southwest of Darlington. One researcher suggests that they were probably first-generation immigrants from Ireland.¹⁸ They had eight children, two of whom, Jeremiah and Timothy, were Baptist ministers.

Timothy II (-1783) was ordained in 1777 at the High Hill Baptist Church in what is now Sumter County. In 1778 he became one of

¹⁸ Henry F. Cauthen, John J. Dargan: His Dares and His Deeds (Columbia, S.C.: State Printing Company, 1975), p. 4.

the founders and the first pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, located about fifteen miles southwest of the present family community. He bought land and built a home near Jeffries Creek where he and his wife Ann Beasley lived with their five daughters and a son.¹⁹

Their son, Timothy III (1771-1839) married Lydia Keith. Of their nine sons, three were doctors, three were lawyers, two were preachers, and one was a country school teacher. All the Dargans in the family community are descended from one son, Dr. William Edwin Dargan (1811-1851), who like Dr. Sam Ervin, was primarily a farmer, confining his medical practice largely to his family and the people living on the place.

Dr. Dargan's son, William Edwin II (1844-1907) farmed the family place, Sleepy Hollow, for many years until he lost it after losing his cotton crop in a fire. After some years he bought and farmed the land which now comprises the Dargan section of the present family community. His grandson and great-grandson, Ned and Edwin Dargan, still farm much of this land today.

The fourth last-name family in the community, the Howards, have learned most of their family history through oral tradition, with names and dates of ancestors supplied from family Bibles. They believe that the first Howard to settle in the area was Richard Grandison Howard, who came to South Carolina from Virginia with Lighthorse Harry Lee during the Revolutionary War and who vowed that if he survived the war

¹⁹Compiled from, W.A. Brunson, History of Ebenezer Church (Darlington, S.C.: Pee Dee Historical Society, 1909); Cauthen, Dargan; Gregg, Cheraws, p. 440; George R. Pettigrew, Annals of Ebenezer (1778-1950): A Record of Achievement (Florence, S.C.: Privately printed by Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1950); Will of Timothy Dargan II, Nov. 5, 1762; Margaret Dargan, "Dargan Family Chart" (n.p.: Privately printed, n.d.).

he would return. He did return, bringing with him a baby daughter, and built his house north of Jeffries Creek on the Old Georgetown Stagecoach Road near Claussen, a community about fifteen miles southeast of the present family community. Across the road from his house he built a tavern, which he operated in addition to his farming interests.

Richard and his wife, Rebecca Jolly, had several daughters and one son, Charles Brown Howard, who continued to farm the family land. Charles married Amelia Cannon, and they had two children: a daughter, Melvina, and a son, Richard Grandison II (1832-1898). Richard II farmed and served for several years in the state legislature, both house and senate. He and his wife, Elizabeth McCall, had several children, only four of whom married. Of those four there were two sons, Fitz Lee Howard and Armstrong Jolly Howard, to carry on the family name. Fitz Lee married Louisa Penn Ervin from Back Swamp Community and farmed the home place in Claussen Community. They had four daughters, all of whom married and lived in Darlington or Florence Counties. Armstrong married Lou Penn's sister, Mae, and bought land adjoining Williamson land in the present family community. Their sons and grandsons farm this land today.

All family members in the community have many other ties to the area besides those established by their last-name ancestors. These ancestors were mostly from the British Isles, but some German and some French Huguenot, and they came directly by way of Charleston or through Pennsylvania or Virginia. Most of them arrived in the state, many in the immediate area, in the mid to late 1700s. To illustrate the sedentary nature of the community, Lucas Dargan said that of his eight

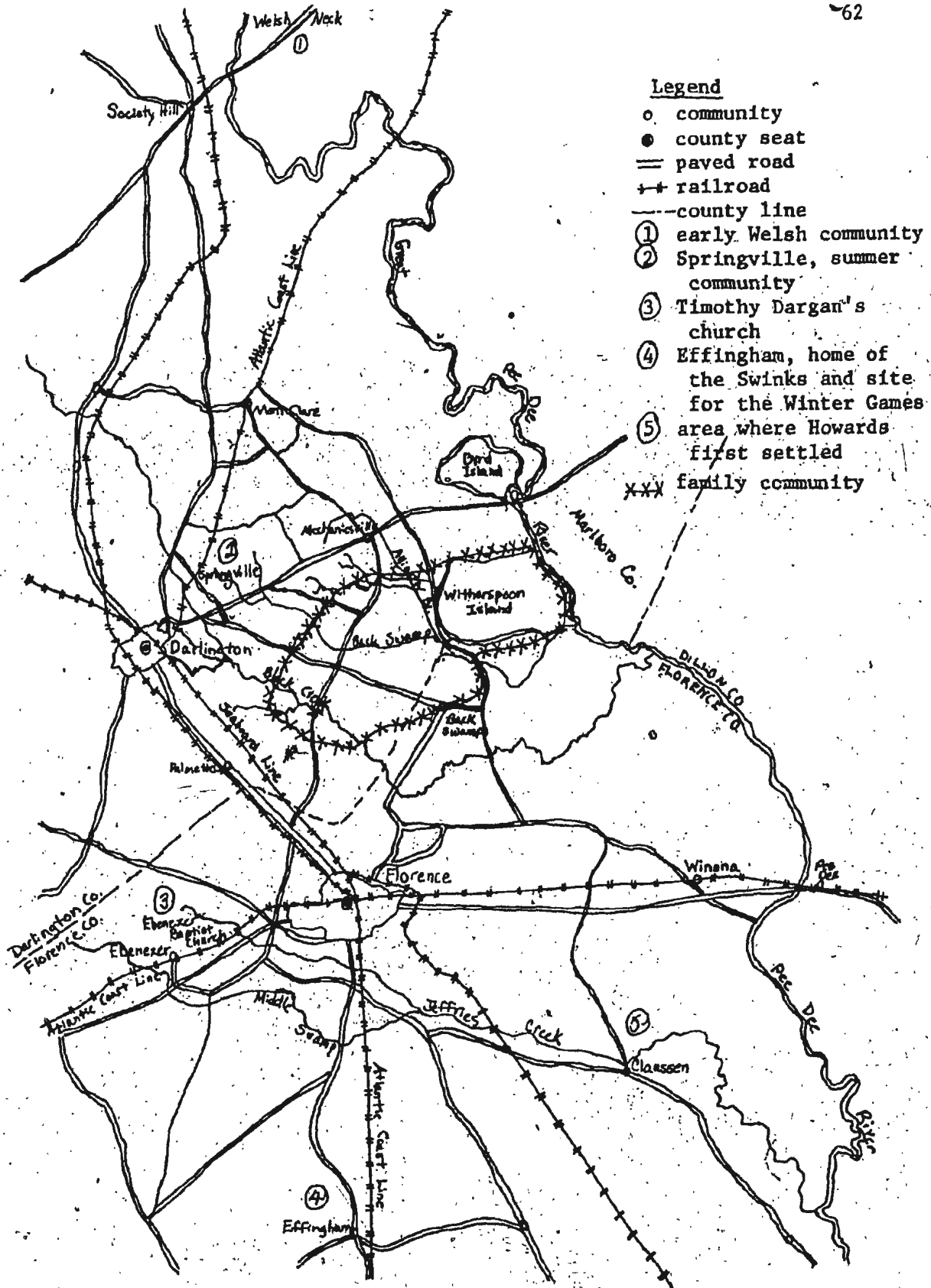


Fig. 3 Map of community and areas of early settlement.

great-grandparents, seven were born in what was then Darlington County, and the eighth was born in Columbia, about 100 miles from the community.

Kinship Terms and Naming Practices

The importance of family and kinship can be seen in the names and titles used in the family. Many of the family's naming practices are common throughout the South and in other parts of the country. Recognizing kinship with the title "Cousin" before a relative's first name is still practiced in the family to a limited extent. Until my own generation, "Cousin" was used to address older close cousins. The title is not necessarily a recognition of close kinship, however. Frank Williamson said that although he was closely related to only one household of Jameses, he grew up calling all of the Jameses in the area, "Cousin." Lucas Dargan suggested that close family friendship is another criterion for calling someone "Cousin."

Older persons who were distantly related, "connected" through marriage, or close friends of the family often had "Mister" or "Miss" added before their first names: Mr. Frank or Miss Hannah. Women were called "Miss" whether married or not. Most of my generation still use these titles, but, except in a few families, they are used only for the oldest generation for whom the traditions are still important.

The tradition of continuing family names, however, is still strong. Almost everyone is named either for an older relative or is given a combination of family names. One son, often the oldest, is named for his father, and oldest daughters frequently are named for either their mothers

or their grandmothers. To avoid confusion, generations often alternate between using first and second names. Thus, the Benjamin Franklin Williamsons have been alternately called "Ben" and "Frank," and the William Edwin Dargans have alternated between "Ned" and "Edwin."

When there are several generations of one family living in the same place, the different generations are often kept straight by titles. Among the Benjamin Franklin Williamsons, for example, the father of the oldest now living is referred to as "Mr. Ben," his son is "Frank," his son is "Ben," and his son, the youngest, is "Little Frank."

Cousins who have the same first name but different last names also have titles to distinguish between them. Although he is twenty-eight years old and over six feet tall, Edwin McIver, who lives 60 miles south of the community, is still called "Little Edwin" by his Dargan relatives to distinguish him from his older first cousin, Edwin Dargan. Edwin Dargan, on the other hand, is called "Little Edwin" by the Williamson family to distinguish him from his older cousin, Edwin Williamson.

Intermarriage and the tradition of continuing family names have been so common that the resulting maze of names includes such combinations as Evander McIver Ervin, Evander Roderick McIver, Roderick McIver Ervin, Evander Ervin Dargan, and Evander McIver Williamson. Women in the family generally take their husband's name, but often hold on to their maiden names in naming their children. The nine family members with the first name "Dargan," and the three with the first name "Ervin," are evidence of this. This practice led to some amusing situations when Ervin Dargan and Dargan Ervin were small boys.

Occupations

Farming has long been the traditional occupation for men in the family. Not all sons have chosen to farm, however. With land being limited and families large, some men in each generation have gone into other professions and left the community. Although there are fewer farmers now than in previous generations, enough sons have chosen to farm so that all the family land is either farmed or used for commercial timber growing. Those who do not farm often rent their land to the farmers in the family. The size of the farms ranges from several hundred to 3,000 acres, and some family members own and farm additional land in other parts of the county. The places owned by the families who do not farm are generally smaller, around 150 to 200 acres.

The chief cash crops in the community are tobacco, soy beans, cotton, and corn, in that order. In 1978 sunflowers were first tried as a farm crop. Beef cattle and hogs are also raised. Family gardens include a variety of fruits and vegetables: tomatoes, corn, beans, peas, mustard and turnip greens, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, radishes, eggplant, squash, cantaloupes, watermelons, grapes, pears, and cooking apples. With the exception of sweet potatoes, these are not sold commercially but are shared among members of the family living in the community and with friends and family in town.

Next to farming, the lumber industry has been the preferred occupation for men in the community. Two are now consulting foresters and manage most of the timber acreage in the community, and several have run sawmills. Others, particularly in my own generation, have gone into a variety of occupations, but the farm and timber land is still

being handled mostly by family members, with limited acreage leased to "outsiders."

A few of the women in the family have professional careers, but most of those living in the community work in their homes. There has been and still is a strong feeling that women should stay at home while their children are young. During the Great Depression a few widowed mothers did teach school while their children were young. But in my parents' generation, only one or two of the women with children worked at regular outside jobs until their children were out of high school.

Education

Formal education has been highly valued in the community for several generations. Most family members have college degrees, and a few have done graduate work. A liberal arts education has been generally preferred; some of the men who farm majored in subjects such as French and English literature, economics, and botany. One traditional branch of education for farmers in earlier generations was medicine, which they often practiced only for their families and for persons who lived and worked on their farms.²⁰

The farmer-doctor who worked a little of both fields is the source of some family anecdotes. One of these was Dr. Horace Williamson,

²⁰ For information on doctors in the family and in Darlington County who were both doctors and farmers, see, Rudisill, Doctors.

a distant relative of the present Williamsons, who practiced medicine in the early 1900s:

Cousin McIver [Williamson] got real interested in him, and he was sort of half farmer and half doctor. And they say he would, uh, he'd be out sowing fertilizer on manure or something and somebody's come running, "Come quick, Doctor. My wife's having a baby." So he'd [brushes hands together] brush off his hands and go. [laughter]

And, uh, Cousin McIver built him, uh, a office and an operating room. And they said that he'd have to sew people up. And somebody told him one time, said, "Doctor," said that needle looks pretty rusty." He said, "Well, that's all right." He dropped it down on the concrete floor and rubbed it. [imitates rubbing needle on floor with shoe] Rubbed the rust and started, turned back to sewing again. (man, 65) (T1)

Higher education has been considered as important for women as for men in the community. The women began attending colleges soon after schools of higher education for women were established in the state in the late 1800s. In families who could not afford to send all the children to college, the oldest children, not just the men, were sent. In one family, however, a relative who offered financial assistance to send one of the children to school, insisted that the money be given to the only daughter rather than the oldest son, since "he will find it easier to work and pay his own way."

Religion

Families in the community are divided between two religious denominations, but this has little effect on family relations. The Ervins and Howard are strongly Presbyterian and have been since their ancestors first came to the area. The Williamsons also were Presbyterian,

but B.F. Williamson joined his wife's church when they were married in the late 1800s, and their descendants have been Episcopalian since then. From the time Timothy Dargan II became a Baptist minister in 1778, and perhaps before then, the Dargans were Baptists. William Edwin Dargan, who moved his family to the community in the late 1800s, however, was an agnostic and his children joined the churches of the ~~persons~~ persons they married. Now all of the Dargans living in the community are Episcopalians.

Social Structure

To the older generations living in the community, World War II marked the end of an era. One family member remarked that until the war the community had changed very little since the War Between the States. One change he and several of his generation have observed is the relative absence of class consciousness among their children and grandchildren. He recalled that when he was growing up in the early 1900s "people didn't do things out of their class." Lewis M. Killan, in his book on white Southerners, suggests two forces which brought about this change in the social structure of the South:

It was the Great Depression of the 1930s and the involvement of the nation in World War II that speeded up change. These two forces, with their roots in the world situation, induced changes in the population and the culture that finally made the South an urban region and broke the grip of the aristocratic tradition.²¹

²¹ Lewis M. Killan, White Southerners (New York: Random House, Inc., 1970), p. 50.

Although the class structure which grew out of the plantation system is no longer viable, among those families who have been in the area for several generations, many associations with the class system of the past remain. One reason for the continued identification of the family with the plantation system is that they are among the few families who have remained on the same land where their ancestors farmed under this system. Also, the farms along the Pee Dee River are generally larger than those in other parts of the county, and local blason populaire continues to perpetuate the differences between the different parts.

A former Darlington County agricultural agent characterized the different parts of the county in terms of their cooperation among themselves and with him on agricultural projects. In the "old plantation side of the county" along the Pee Dee River, he said, people cooperate well with one another but primarily on the basis of family; the communities in the middle of the county are more democratic and cooperate more on a community level; the communities along Lynches River are highly individualistic and do not like to be told by anyone what to do. These stereotypes appear to be generally recognized and contribute to the continued association of the Pee Dee River families with the plantation system, even though family background functions less significantly in the social and economic life of the area.

Rights and Obligations

The distinctions between the different ways of grouping the kindred become especially important in the recognition of reciprocal

rights and obligations. Different responsibilities are associated with different types of family grouping and with the role relationships of members in the group. Parents have certain responsibilities toward their children and children toward their parents. The obligations toward immediate family members differ from the obligations toward second or more distant cousins. When someone in the community is sick, everyone is expected to visit and perhaps bring food or gifts, but the responsibility of daily nursing is generally shared among members of the immediate family.

If the immediate family members cannot fulfill a task, it then becomes important to know who is next in line in responsibility. Parents, for example, are expected to send their children to college, but relatives frequently come to the assistance of those who cannot afford it. Usually, this responsibility is taken over by the closest relative who can afford it.

Adherence to understood rules of who is responsible and when is not strict, but a deviation from expected obligations usually elicits an explanation. A common explanation involves calling on another family allegiance. An estate, for example, is usually divided among direct descendants, with the greatest amount going to the closest of kin. By bringing to bear the importance of a family name, a portion of the inheritance may go to someone who is not a direct descendant, but who has the same name. Or, a family member could justify not attending to an obligation toward a second cousin if it meant sacrificing his duties toward his children, by saying, "My children have to come first." It is sometimes important to know, however, when one family allegiance

can be given precedence over another.

The reciprocal responsibilities surrounding kinship have, over the generations, given support to family stability and strength to survive disasters. Children are reared, in a sense, not only by their parents but by uncles, aunts, and cousins, and the responsibility of caring for relatives who are unable to support or care for themselves is shared within the family. There have been times when one household was in danger of losing its land, and another family member bought the land, holding it in trust until the original owner could buy it back. During the Great Depression, one family sold land, which they owned outside the community, to save the home place of relatives. It is characteristic of the family that this kind of assistance is rarely mentioned. I was told about such aid only after promising not to mention names or specific details either in my thesis or to anyone else in the family.

Although certain responsibilities toward kin are expected, family members generally try not to take advantage of their relatives by asking or accepting too much. They do not expect aid as a matter of course. Although family members often extend open invitations to their relatives to pick vegetables in their gardens, hunt on their land, or swim at their creek place, these relatives usually call and ask permission each time they come. They are careful to respect the privacy of their relatives and to show appreciation for their generosity, and they are critical of those who do not.

Values

By supporting each other through financial disaster and hard times,

family members have been able to hold on to the "home places" and maintain the continuity important for a strong family tradition. Another reason for their being able to hold on to family land for several generations has been their use of conservation practices in farming as a basic principle for protecting and preserving their land and resources. A soil conservationist visiting the community several years ago remarked that there were more conservation methods being practiced in the community than in any other community of its size in the state. The lumbermen in the family, Ervin Dargan and Vannie Ervin, have worked on methods and machines to achieve a better utilization of wood, and several family members have been active in conservation organizations and public agencies dealing with natural resources.

Probably the most important work contributing to community stability has been the use of conservation methods in farming the family lands. The Williamson family, in particular, has worked to promote scientific farming and has worked its own land in such a way as to preserve and enhance its productivity. Family members have been active in efforts to prevent the pollution of Black Creek and other waters. This has allowed them, and others, to continue using the creek as the focal point for recreation in the community.

Land is important not only as a source of income but also as a cherished possession of the family. This is particularly true of land which has been in the family for several generations. Often, two or three family members will buy a tract of land together, and any income from the land will be shared according to the percentage of their interest. Conversation among family members often involves some discussion of the land and its features, and the attachment to it is strong:

Lucas Dargan: Well, I just thought of my family as being farming people. And I guess you just grow up with a strong feeling for land when you feel you're farmers. And, uh, I mean you grow up worrying about the drought and worrying about the wet spells, worrying about the early frost. I mean you're just very conscious of things that go with the land. And even though you might not, uh, might not all be a pleasant association, it becomes a deep-seated attachment, I think. (T15)

There is a strong feeling among members of the family living in the community, and even among some who have moved away, that "the country," and the family community, in particular, is the best place to live. Lucas Dargan, whose family moved to town when he was three years old, after his father's death, said that even though he never knew the community as well as his older brother and sister, like them, he felt that he belonged there:

I didn't really feel nearly as close to the community as Ned and Mary Hart, although we always said, all of us as we grew up, we always assumed that we were go' move back to the country sometime. We always talked about "when we move back to the country we're go' do so-and-so." It just, I mean, it was just accepted that the country was the best place you ought to live. That was where we ought to be. (T15)

Frank Williamson talked about a basic difference he saw between rural and urban living:

I guess you get this basic difference between rural people and city people. They're [rural people] in one place. It makes them right different people. If you move you can be one person somewhere and another person somewhere else. If you make mistakes you can start over. But it's a real sobering influence to be part of a community. (FN2)

Although family members are often critical of each other and enjoy poking fun at their relative's weaknesses, there is a strong feeling

that the family is and always has been made up of basically "good people." One family member expressed this feeling when she said, "One thing I think is interesting about this family is that it's so big and it's made up of such good people. You know, there are no thieves or anyone like that in the family. We must have had some good ancestors." Another suggested that this attitude is instilled in family members at an early age: "I tell you how I was raised. I was a grown woman before I realized that any of my kinfolks could do anything wrong." Most, of course, recognize that there are some relatives of whom no one would be proud. As one family member pointed out, "If you search your family tree too hard, you're bound to find some rascals."

Although this is a close-knit family, there is a great respect for privacy. Too much talk or inquiry about someone's personal affairs is discouraged. If a conversation begins to sound like gossip, it is often cut off by someone expressing disinterest or making a final statement admitting no further discussion. Even brothers and sisters sometimes do not talk about personal problems with each other. Important information gets passed on but is seldom discussed openly at large family gatherings. Every family member learns, though may not practice, how to be discrete in giving out information. There are times when, even in private, few details may be given.

There are definite standards about what is considered appropriate and moral behavior in the family, but, even so, the atmosphere is not highly restricting. Individuals know that they will be accepted by the family no matter what they do or say, even though their relatives may greatly disapprove of their behavior. One in-law felt that the

family was too tolerant; "This family will accept anything." Criticism and disapproval are expressed, however, but generally in private, or discretely in public. They are seldom handled by not speaking to someone, or excluding someone from family occasions. This is, perhaps, because family harmony is more important than family agreement.

This does not mean that family members do not argue. They do. They have very different opinions on how to rear children, how to farm, how to run the country. An outsider once remarked that what amazed him most about the family was that a group of people with such divergent interests, opinions, and political philosophies could get along so well. The importance of family harmony is one explanation. Another is that family members generally admire independent thinking, and encourage it in their children. Children are taught to show respect for their elders, but not necessarily to agree with them. Some of the highest compliments are that someone "is an independent thinker," "has the courage of his convictions," or "puts actions behind his words."

Farmers differ in their approaches to farming, but this is not generally a source of argument between them. Ned Dargan believes in using as little big machinery as possible. He rents any large machines that he needs. Billy Howard has his own equipment and a base of operation on the family farm; then, he rents farm land in a ten or fifteen-mile radius from the farm. The Williamsons farm only their own land and use only their own equipment. "We sort of carry self-sufficiency to an extreme," said Frank Williamson.

Family members are also quite different in their political philosophies. There are Republicans, Democrats, and those who claim to be

independent. Family loyalty does not generally enter into politics. Husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and cousins do not consistently vote the same, nor do family members always vote for their relatives who run for political office. Quite frequently, they switch their usual political affiliation to vote for a person they admire rather than the platform or the party.

Cousins and Friends

An important part of growing up in the family community is that cousins often become close friends. Most of their closest neighbors are cousins, and family gatherings held throughout the year bring back for visits relatives living outside the community. The cousins who grew up during the Depressions of the 1930s very rarely went into town and were especially close:

We were without a car a long time during the Depression. During the summer we might not go to town at all. But we had everything we wanted. You know, the whole clan. We didn't really need our town friends. (woman, 63) (FN2)

The same relative described how lost and depressed she felt when her cousins went to college, leaving her at home alone: "I thought of myself as part of the clan. Then I just kind of lost my identity when I lost the family."

Parents were not always pleased that their children had few friends outside the family:

Mother used to get so mad with us. She'd say, if we wanted to have a birthday party or something, "Who do you

want to invite?" "Oh, just the cousins." And she'd say "Well, you just need to have some other friends." And we'd say, "Well, we just like our cousins better than anybody else." [laughs] Of course, we lived in the country and we didn't get into town a great deal. And just nobody else lived real close to play with, but somehow we could always visit back and forth with our cousins. Of course, we had friends in school, and we'd visit them occasionally, too. But it was mostly cousins. (T8)

Some friends and in-laws have also complained that the family is too clannish. A boyfriend of one of the Dargan girls who grew up during the 20s and 30s once complained that his biggest rival was the clan. An in-law of the same generation told his wife, "The trouble with your family is that they're too clannish and self-sufficient. They don't think they need anyone else."

One family member explained that being clannish is a family tradition:

I don't think the family is clannish because we feel superior to other people or because we don't like other people. We just enjoy being with each other. We're enough alike that we enjoy each other. All our best friends are in the family. You just grow up accepting that you're close to your family. It's a tradition. (man, 60) (FN2)

My own generation is not quite as clannish as their parents who grew up during the Depression, but they still spend a large part of their leisure time with their family, and many of their closest friends are cousins. I asked two of my contemporaries why they thought this was so:

Tug: Well, we never had any choice. Every time you turned around you were going to something family. [laughter]

Tim: Well, that's true, but it's just a coincidence to me that a lot of my, I think, that a lot of my best friends happen

to be cousins. I got a lot of flack about this from somebody I used to date. [laughter] I won't mention any names. She thought I put the family above everything, and I really didn't. There are plenty of people that I don't particularly care for that are my cousins. But, I mean, it just so happened that most of my best friends also happen to be my cousins. (T5)

The close friendships that develop between cousins are an important bond holding the family and the community together. It means that family gatherings are not inspired simply by obligations of kinship but also by ties of friendship between persons who genuinely enjoy each other's company.

Over the generations the family has developed a strong sense of place and a strong sense of family identity. They feel part of a "respectable," educated, landowner tradition. From this they have derived a sense of security, which has persisted even during difficult periods when they had little money and were in danger of losing their land. They feel that their position in the area is firmly established; thus, they sometimes resort to a kind of reverse snobbishness in which they play up their ruralness, flaunting their simplicity rather than their sophistication. This is apparent in their pastimes as well as in their verbal art, as the following chapters will show.

CHAPTER IV

PATTERNS OF LEISURE

Social life in the community centers around family-organized pastimes. These activities afford an opportunity for close interaction between relatives living in the community and a means of staying in contact with relatives who have moved away. Since participation in family gatherings is voluntary, family members living outside the community choose whether or not to remain a part of the close family group by their attendance. Some come to at least a few gatherings from as far away as 200 miles. By coming regularly, or occasionally to the large family gatherings held twice a year, they reaffirm their membership in the group. Even many of those who rarely come, however, are still invited. Thus, the invitations to the gatherings identify who is eligible for family membership and the attendance of relatives signifies the intimacy of the group. Both are important parts of family identity.

Daily Visiting

Daily visiting between children in the community fosters close friendships. The children also spend weeks, sometimes months, visiting their cousins who live outside the area. Margaret Ervin described some of the visits between cousins in the 20s and 30s:

We were always visiting back and forth. And even the ones, the Wares, you know, that lived in Greenville, Mary and Anne and those. And the Gandys down at Andrews. We'd go down there. Sae and Mary and I used to go down and spend a month with Mary Sloan at Andrews. Ily would go and spend time in Greenville with Anne. Ily and Hap, you know. We've always visited back and forth. And, uh, after we moved over in the house where Ned and Cullough live now, well, the children used to go up. You know, the cousins from off used to come and stay there. And then sometimes Aunt Liza would come and bring her family down and stay with Gran-Gran. Or Aunt Edna would come and stay with her awhile.

Then, of course, we had the Ervin cousins, too. The Howards, you know, lived where Annie Louise and Jolly live. Maizie was there. And then, uh, Betty Douglas and Jack and Louise and Betty moved down here. And we'd visit back and forth with them, too. And we used to ride horseback. And, uh, we had different times we had ponies or horses or something. And, uh, we'd ride over to Maizie's or she'd ride over to our house. And we'd get Lou Privette, you know, lived with Aunt Blanche and those. Sometimes Betty used to come and join us, and she rode an old mule. [laughter] And, uh, Maizie had a fine Arabian horse. She was a real good horse. I had a pony one time, a Shetland pony. Then later on I used to ride a big old, uh, buggy horse. It was a pretty good saddle horse, too. He was sort of rough on his trot, but he had a good gallop. Maizie and I used to get way ahead of Betty, and we'd have to stop and wait for Betty and John Brown, the old mule, [laughs] (T8)

The big meal in the middle of the day is the time when most adults in the community get together to talk. Some families, especially those who farm, have all the adults in two or three generations of the extended family for the meal. Children are fed beforehand. Since this is the hottest time of day, the meal is leisurely, and the men often rest before going back out to work.

Settings

Many of the more organized family gatherings center around important geographical features in the community: Black Creek, Pee Dee River, Witherspoon Island, and Lowther's Lake. Each setting has

certain activities traditionally associated with it. Black Creek, the swift, "black-water" stream which flows through the eastern part of Darlington County and the northeastern tip of Florence County on its way to the Pee Dee River, has been a favorite swimming, fishing, and gathering spot for residents of both counties for several generations. It has been said that for the people of Darlington County, Black Creek is "holy water." Evidence of this devotion was the formation in 1941 of the Black Creek Protective Association. This organization, always headed by a member of the family, Jolly Howard, has fought a continuing battle to prevent pollution of the creek.

Since the family owns land bordering the creek, their ties to the stream are especially strong. One devoted relative took along a bottle of Black Creek water when she went to New York City to study. "I couldn't bear to be separated from it," she explained. "I used to open the jar and smell it." It is in Black Creek that most of the children learn to swim, and here on the cool creek bank that all like to gather for picnics or afternoon swims during the hot summer months. Several vows have been made over the years to swim in the creek at least once in every month of the year, which has sometimes involved breaking a thin layer of ice in January and February. And, it is traditional that the groom in a family wedding, whether family member or prospective in-law, be thrown into the creek the morning before the wedding -- or at some other appropriate time in the case of out-of-town weddings.

The Pee Dee River is used for fishing and boat trips to the coast. The bottomland or "swamp" bordering it is a favorite place for hunting. Witherspoon Island, bounded by the Pee Dee River and Lowther's Lake, an

old ox-bow of the river, occupies about 3,600 acres of "the swamp."

Partially owned at one time by the Ervin family, the island had several owners before it was bought in 1904 by the Howard family. The island and the boat landings on Lowther's Lake have been the scenes of many fall picnics, special suppers, and camp-outs.

Interesting features of the island are the several hundred acres of old fields, many recently reclaimed for pasture or row crops, old houses and barns dating from the early 1800s, and acres of sand hills completely surrounded by swamp land. The sand hills presumably were formed thousands of years ago when the Pee Dee River was a rushing torrent capable of transporting coarse materials. The river is now a slow coastal plain stream in the community, transporting only the finest sediments, the source of the rich red soils which characterize its flood plain.

Secular and Religious Holidays

A number of family celebrations are associated with religious and secular holidays. The Christmas and Fourth of July gatherings have been for several generations the largest family occasions. They are the ones which draw more relatives from outside the community. A family "dining," or formal meal indoors, is the traditional Christmas celebration. Usually this includes only three or four generations of an extended family group. Since the space inside is limited, these extended family meals tend to break off into smaller groups as the family grows larger.

For many years, the nine children, the grandchildren, and the great-grandchildren of Mary Hart and William Edwin Dargan gathered for a dining on Christmas Day. Ned Dargan recalled the occasion and why it broke up:

When we were children, as long as I can remember, when we were children we had all of my, uh, Grandfather's family, my mother and all the aunts, at the Christmas dining. And we'd have it at different places: Uncle Benton's, Aunt Ida's, Aunt Liza's. Had to have it in the country, wasn't room enough in town. [laughs] So it was in the country. And everybody would bring food. And, uh, we'd have the whole crowd and children. Just finally got so unwieldy from the grandchildren, when Grandfather's grandchildren started having so many children, so many little children and all, just couldn't get them all ready. That was on Christmas Day. So we finally gave it up after so many little children around....

We ate inside. But all the festivities and talking and playing [were outside]. And, uh, we used to play football, have touch football game. All the boys from twelve years old on up to thirty years old. And that was one of the special occasions was the football game. The football game used to get sort of rough too. And hadn't been out playing football or exercising all year or for ten years or something. And we'd choose up sides and have a football game Christmas Day.

And the older, the older men, our uncles and all, they had a special event, was throwing silver dollars to a line. And they'd gamble on it sort of mildly. But, uh, there were about six or eight of those: Uncle Benton and Uncle Hugh, Uncle Henry and Joe and several of the older fellows. They'd have two lines. A line here and a line there and silver dollars, and they'd have a contest throwing. I remember that. We'd watch that. Throwing silver dollars [laughs] to the line. I practiced up, and I got pretty good. And later on we got to throwing things. We threw quarters and fifty cent pieces, the young folks. If we were [laughs] tired watching we'd get a game going off the side. (T7)

When this group grew too large for a seated meal indoors, the children began having separate dinings with their own children and grandchildren. Now these gatherings are becoming too large, and smaller groups have begun to split off again.

As family members move away from the community, some changes occur

in the Christmas dinings. The children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of Mildred and Benton Dargan now have their dining the Sunday after Christmas for the sake of family members who do not want to drive a long distance on Christmas Day. In recent years, the dining for the descendants of Ida and Hugh Ervin has been confined mostly to the families living in the community, since the family members living in other towns have found it increasingly difficult to travel on Christmas Day.

At present, there are several extended family celebrations on Christmas Day. One of these is the two-day gathering of Lucas and Frances Dargan and their respective brother and sister, Ned and Cullough Dargan, who have celebrated Christmas with their parents and their brother's and sister's families since the early 1950s. On Christmas Eve the family gathers at Lucas's and Frances's house, where they have supper, sing Christmas carols, and show slides of previous family gatherings. Then, young children are put to bed, and the adults go to the Christmas Eve church service.

The next morning the family gathers in the same house for a Christmas breakfast. After breakfast gifts are exchanged, then everyone goes across the road to Ned's and Cullough's house for Christmas dinner. The afternoon is usually spent resting and visiting other relatives or friends, particularly the oldest family members and those who are bedridden. A party for the whole community of cousins is held in Ned's and Cullough's house that night.

For as long as members of the family can remember, the Fourth of July has been celebrated with a large family picnic on the banks of

Black Creek. The changes in the composition of the group point to the changes in the concepts of family and community over the years. In the early 1900s the Dargans and Ervins had their picnic at either the Ervin or the Dargan creek place. The Williamsons, Jameses, and McIvers had their picnic at the Williamson place. The Howards met alternately with both groups. After Sarah Dargan married Frank Williamson and most of the Jameses and McIvers moved away from the community, the Williamsons began meeting with the Dargan-Ervin group. In the past several years the picnic has moved back to the Williamson place, and the members of the James and McIver families who still live in the area are also invited.

A more recent tradition for the Fourth of July and Christmas dates from about 1967, when Ervin Dargan and Woody Swink organized the Family Games. All of the descendants of Evander Ervin and William Edwin Dargan are invited to the games, which shows how the marriages between the two Ervins and the two Dargans in the late 1800s has largely determined the identity of the community-based family group. Evander Ervin and William Edwin Dargan are grandfathers of the children of these two marriages; the remaining family members are descended from only one of them.

It is significant that three households of Ervins in the community are not included in these gatherings. They are descended from a younger brother of Evander Ervin, and because they were considerably younger than their second cousins, they did not become close friends while growing up in the community. These Ervins are included in the Fourth of July picnic and in other family gatherings, however, and in recent years have been invited over for the softball game which is part of the Summer

Games. As they have grown older and age difference has become less important, they have become closer to their second cousins. The initiation of the Family Games was a self-conscious attempt to bring together the family members who had been close as children, especially those who had moved away, and to insure that their children would also be friends. The remaining Ervins, therefore, were excluded more on the basis of a former lack of intimacy rather than on present friendships.

Some Summer Game activity, especially the tennis matches, extends over about three days around the Fourth of July. A picnic on the Fourth is still held at Black Creek, but the games and other picnic meals during the three-day period are held at Ervin Dargan's home, partly because all who attend the picnic at the creek are not involved in the games. Tennis matches, swimming contests, horse shoe matches, tug-of-war, and several games for small children are the main events.

The Winter Games are held the weekend after Christmas in Effingham, a community in Florence County about twenty miles southeast of the family community, at the home of the Swinks, descendants of Evander Ervin. Everyone contributes to the picnic meal, and the Swinks provide a barbecued pig and sweet potatoes. The main events are tennis, basketball, football, volleyball, tug-of-war, sack racing, corn shucking, skeet shooting, a turkey shoot (target shooting with a turkey as the prize), see-back (a card game), and bird hunting. The day ends with a square dance back in the family community.

While the Games and other family pastimes are organized according to one sense of family group, within these settings other family identifications may be manipulated. The teams for competition in the

Family Games, for example, are divided along family lines. When members of a team want a family member skilled in a particular sport to play on their team, they often will draw on a sense of family group which includes him. The other teams may try another sense of family to get the same player, which sometimes results in a great deal of teasing and banter about family allegiances. This kind of teasing and manipulation of family identities is a regular part of interaction between family members.

In spite of the teasing and the fact that scores are kept, the games are not highly competitive. Members of one group will often play for an opposing team to even up the number of players. Individuals and groups accumulate points for their team, but most members of the family never bother to find out which team scored highest. The games are primarily a way of getting the family together; the outcome of the competition is relatively unimportant.

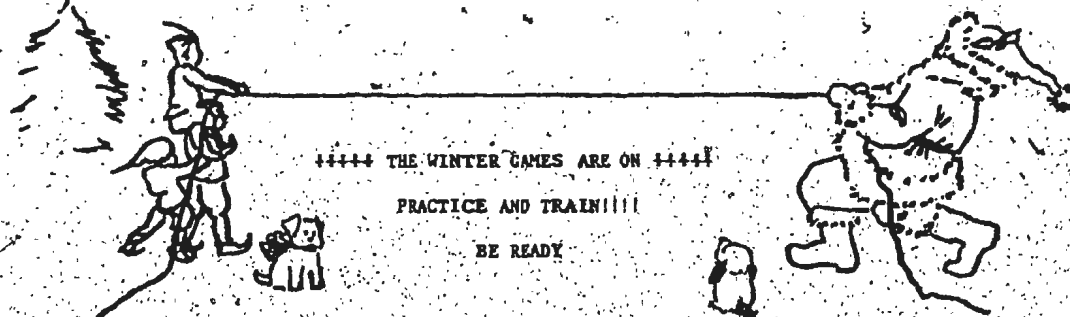
Thanksgiving is another time for large family gatherings, but few relatives from outside the community participate. Since the early 1900s most of the men in the community have spent Thanksgiving weekend hunting on Witherspoon Island. They stay in a cabin on the island and take with them sausage, hominy, sweet potatoes, and eight pounds of "chittlins" per person. They count on the game killed during the hunt to fill out the menu. Squirrel stew is the traditional second night supper, but the principal quarry is deer. Wild turkey were the prime game in the past when the island was covered with virgin timber, and the forest floor was open. Later when the forests were cut over, the change in habitat, with abundant low-growing forage, favored the deer population.

The hunt is strictly for adult men. Women are not invited, and boys are allowed to go only after they turn eighteen or graduate from high school. Vannie Ervin recalled being allowed to go once when he was a child, but he and his cousins had to camp apart from the men. They could participate only by running errands for the older men.

The hunt can be seen as a kind of initiation into adulthood for the boys in the family. Richard Howard considered it significant that on his first hunt, he had his first drink with his father (See p.161). The rituals involved in the hunt also have qualities of initiation. A boy who shoots his first deer is smeared with the blood of the animal, a common practice among hunters. Those who shoot and miss have a piece of their shirt tied to a designated tree.

Women and children in the early 1900s camped on the edge of Back Swamp during the Thanksgiving weekend. Some of the men helped to set up camp before leaving for the Witherspoon Island hunt. Ily Ervin Jeffers recalled how her father built a lean-to for sheltering food and other supplies, a large fire to last all night for warmth, and a small fire with a spit over it for cooking. Today the women and children have a picnic on Black Creek, and a few families in the community go to a large non-family picnic held in the river swamp by a local hunting club.

These large family occasions are called "family gatherings," not "reunions," as many such family celebrations are called throughout the United States. One family member pointed out that this is because most family members see one another throughout the year and are not, therefore, being reunited after a long absence.



WHEN: Monday, December 27, 1976---9 a. m. til complete
(If it rains, next day) Be sure to come early---
it's a full day!

WHERE: Effingham

Had 125 last year. Looking for a crowd. Be there if you kin.

Get in touch with the following or the committee for entries and suggestions:

Tennis:	Henry S., Benton D. and Fraddie D.
Tug of War:	Bubba (Walter) D. and Henry J.
Football and/or Basketball:	Marion S. and Tim D.
Quail Hunting:	James S. and Edwin D.
Target Shooting:	Frank W. and Van (younger) E.
Set Back:	Suter and Jack D.
Turkey Shoot:	Walter and Van E.
Picnic Lunch:	Hatsey S., Sara W. and Margaret E.
Official Scheduling & Scoring:	John J. and John D.

Same assignments as last year - if you can't do it, let me know.

FOOD: The Swinks will have the Bar-B-Que again this year. SOUNDS GOOD!!!
Cole Salv will also be furnished and a few choice feet of chitlings
for those with better taste!

Bring enough hamburgers, paper plates, rolls and drinks for your
own family.

THE COMMITTEE

Erv

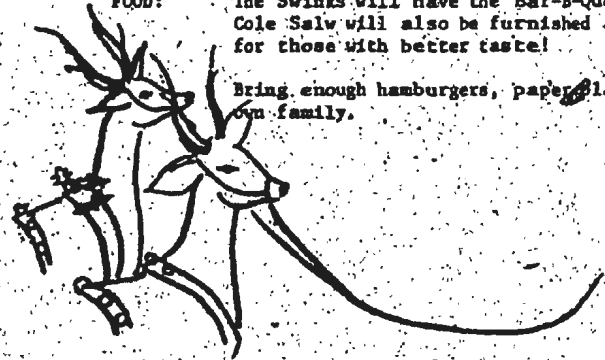


Fig. 4 Invitation to the Winter Games

The Family Calendar

In addition to secular and religious holidays, the family has created its own calendar of special celebrations. If an occasion is successful, it may become a regular thing, which means that new events are continually being incorporated into the family tradition. Birthday parties, particularly those for the oldest members of the family, often become large annual family celebrations. Some continue for twenty or thirty years. Every few years new parties become established traditions, while old ones are discontinued. Although some celebrations have been held for as long as family members can remember, the family calendar is always changing.

Several years ago I held a square dance in my home for the first time, and relatives suggested that I hold it every year at that time. Now the party is an annual occasion. About eight years ago, a boat trip down one of the rivers in the state was adopted as an annual tradition by some of the young men. The tradition ended after some of the men got married. About twenty years ago, the five daughters of Ida and Hugh Ervin and their double-first cousins, the daughters of Mildred and Benton Dargan, started the "Sisters' Houseparty." Suter Ervin told me how it became a tradition:

Just every now and then when we'd get together at the Fourth of July or Christmas or something like that, we'd talk about, you know, how sad it was we didn't get together very much. So, one time we decided to try to have a house party with the ten sisters, five of each. I think the first time we had one we left, they left about forty some odd children at home with various and assorted husbands and aunts and grandmothers and things like that. [laughs]. And we had such a

good time that we just decided to make it an annual occasion. And we've done it every year now for at least fifteen years, or longer. I don't know how long we've had it. But, uh, we just have such a good time reminiscing about the things we used to do, things that happened to us. We can just laugh and laugh and laugh. The same tales we tell over and over are still funny. (T8)

Since farming has been the main occupation in the community over the years, the patterns of leisure have been determined, in part, by the farm year. Changes in farming have brought changes in the family's holidays and traditional celebrations. The cultivation of cotton as the major crop, until the arrival of the boll weevil and the Depression left several months of the year relatively free for vacations. When the plowing was finished in late June or early July, cotton was "laid-by" until the fall harvest. Many families took long summer vacations, and some had summer homes away from the malarial wetlands near the river. Health springs and mountain resorts were popular places to escape the mosquitoes and heat. Farmers participated very little in the actual labor of farming, often depending on the overseers to manage the farm while they were vacationing.

With the introduction of tobacco in the early 1900s, more time had to be spent tending and harvesting, and vacation time was reduced. Tobacco harvesting, which begins in July and lasts through August, is the busiest time of the farm year. Tobacco also has more stages of processing before marketing, and it has to be watched more carefully than cotton. Farmers can not as easily leave it to the care of an overseer as they could with cotton.

Frank Williamson recalled the time a relative came to visit the

family after a long period away from the community. At the end of the day, he remarked to Frank's father, "Cousin Ben, I thought farming was a gentleman's occupation. When did it get like this?" "When we started growing tobacco," was the reply.

The addition of soybeans and corn as major crops, the use of heavy machinery to replace farm labor, the use of herbicides and more fertilizers, and the participation of farmers in the day to day work have brought more changes in the patterns of work and leisure. A farmer of my generation pointed out one difference between three generations of farmers in his family. His grandfather always wore a white shirt and a tie on the farm and worked solely as manager of the farming operation, although he did repair machinery on the place. He felt that his son, who wore a tie but not a white shirt, participated too much in the actual labor. The present generation wears neither a tie nor a white shirt, and their father feels that they do too much of the day to day labor.

Ned Dargan, a farmer, described the present farm year:

You work year-round on tobacco. We, starting in November, we get the tobacco plant beds ready for the next year. You have to get them fertilized and treated, fumigated for weed control and kill, for nematode control. Actually start in October: October, November, December. Then we plant tobacco beds in January and February. We often don't plant them all the same time, because it's best to vary your timing on it. And, uh, but during the winter, except for that we start plowing the land. And January and February -- things are not so pushing then -- you just catch up on odd jobs: fix fences and so forth, and plow on the good days, when the weather is suitable. And do woods work too, burning and work on fire lanes, fire lines.

And, uh, but your busy time starts in March and April. And we have to treat all land now for, uh, with a herbicide for grass and weed control. You have to plow ahead of time and then treat it with herbicide. But that takes a long time. We extend that up until -- I just finished treating for soybeans [June]. You've got to treat tobacco land, soybean land and corn land. And so

April and May and June are probably your busiest times, except for tobacco gathering. Then your tobacco gathering is the peak of your busy time. It takes so much labor to gather and put tobacco in barns.

And we used to, when I was a boy, we'd look forward to lay-by time. Lay-by time, you've never heard of that. You know cotton was about the main crop in these parts, and then cotton and tobacco. But in June or early part of July you finished plowing all your crops. You don't want to plow them too long. And you lay-by. The last plowing you lay-by. When you plow it the last time it's laid-by. And so always looked forward to lay-by time. When you lay-by time then you have time to go fishing, or picnicing and rambling in the woods. We used to do a lot of rambling. What we called, Sunday afternoons, said, "Let's go rambling." We'd just go different places we hadn't been before or in a long time. We'd sometimes walk. We'd get us a good stick and go through the woods, field and all. Go for five or ten or fifteen miles, rambling. Just to look at things in the woods, different places.

But in the fall of the year, of course, we, uh, that's harvest time. You harvest tobacco in July and August. But then you harvest cotton, corn, and soybeans in the fall starting September: September, October, November. That's your harvest time. And always looked forward to getting through gathering cotton, finish with cotton and beans so you have more time for vacationing or hunting. (T7)

Since most family members in the community were free the same time of year, they often spent their vacations together. The women and their daughters spent several weeks of every summer in the North Carolina mountains during the 1920s and 30s. Around 1900 Pawley's Island on the coast of South Carolina became a popular summer resort, and family members began spending part of their summer vacations there. Eventually, the Williamsons, the Howards, and the Dargans bought summer houses near each other on the island.

Several family trips stand out in the memories of the generation who grew up during the 20s and 30s. One of these was a trip to the coast to visit Henry and Bessie Dargan:

Margaret Ervin: One of the wildest trips we ever took was when we went down to the beach to visit Uncle Henry and Aunt Bessie. Uncle Henry was one of the developers of Cherry Grove Beach. You know, Ocean Drive and all that section along there. The first two houses they built down there he took his family down and was living down there selling lots and things like that. And they said come see them, you know.

So we cooked up this scheme. And, of course, didn't have any telephones, I don't guess, down there. And, uh, we decided to all go down and surprise them. All the Dargan brothers and sisters and their wives and husbands and children. Let's see, there was Aunt Liza and her four — Henry may not have been there — Aunt Liza and her children, Aunt Blanche and hers, Aunt Rose and hers, uh, Mother and Father and all of us, and Aunt Mildred and Uncle Benton, and uh, I don't remember, but it was quite a crowd. I was about twelve years old, so I guess it was about 1922.

And, uh, we decided we were go' leave — we were living in Ned's and Cullough's, that house then — go' leave at four o'clock in the morning because it was a long trip, you know. The roads we had then. We had to cross the ferry down at Pee Dee River and everything. So, we were go' leave at four o'clock. Well, we woke up that morning and it was pouring rain. "Oh, what in the world!" All the children just so upset. "It doesn't matter. Let's so, let's go anyhow." We were all having a fit. So, Aunt Blanche and her crowd came, Aunt Liza and her crowd came, Aunt Rose's children, and, uh, we were there. And so everybody debated, "Should we go or shouldn't we. Maybe it's go' clear up. Maybe it's go' rain all day, and the roads will be impassable." 'Cause none of them were paved. Well, we debated and debated about it, and Uncle Benton and Aunt Mildred didn't come and didn't come. And finally, I don't know whether we talked to them on the telephone, and then maybe they said they weren't coming. I believe they decided against it.

But we finally struck out, about five car loads of us. And, uh, I guess we didn't leave until about 6:00 o'clock, but anyhow we stopped at Winona. You know where Winona is? (AD: No.) Well, it's before you get to the Pee Dee River. Stopped down there at a tobacco barn and cooked breakfast. [laughs] And, oh, the children were so excited. And the roads were so bad, so slick. And I remember Aunt Liza had a big old Studebaker. Marion was driving it, and he was so little. He was just looking through the steering wheel, you know, driving like that. And Aunt Liza was sitting up there and Anne were so scared. They didn't want to cross the ferry. And, uh, so the nearer we got to the ferry the scarer they got. And so when we finally got down there and saw the river, well, they just let out a howl. They weren't going. Wanted to go home. Oh, just a time we had....

But we finally all got 'cross the ferry and then on our way. And the road was really terrible through the swamp and everything,

"But we got down the road a little way and we saw Uncle Benton and those coming. Oh, we were so excited! [laughs] But, uh, we had quite a trip down there. And we got down and surprised — as you can imagine if twenty-five people descended on you. "Surprise, surprise, we came to stay a week." And, uh, but we had carried all the food, you know, and just everything, even crates of chickens on the running board of the car, you know. Live chickens, because we didn't have refrigeration.... But we had a grand time. And we'd fish right out there in the surf, catch fish and bring them in, scale them and cook them right away, you know. Had an assembly line we'd put them in. We had to eat in shifts because there were so many of us. But, uh, we really, really had a grand time. (T8)

Today, families in the community no longer spend their vacations together in large groups. Many still go to Pawley's Island during the summer, however, and often spend time together there.

The farm year has determined not only the time allowed for leisure, it also has affected the kinds of activities held throughout the year. The introduction of tobacco as a major crop led to a special picnic supper, which was popular for several years. Since the wood burning furnaces in the tobacco barns had to be kept going continuously with close temperature control, someone had to stay up all night to tend the fires. Usually a young boy in the family or from a tenant family would take the night watch. Hugh Ervin, however, allowed his daughters to watch the barns at night, a practice of which some family members highly disapproved. "But we never had a barn burn down," Ily Ervin Jeffers said proudly.

To help the person on night watch stay awake, cousins and friends would bring over chicken bog suppers and stay for several hours. Chicken bog is a dish made of rice cooked in chicken broth with pepper and pieces of chicken added. Corn and sweet potatoes were roasted over the fire, and watermelons were cut for dessert. Usually these parties were held by

teenage boys and girls, but men in the community also had chicken bog suppers when one of them was on watch. When oil curers replaced wood fires for curing tobacco, there was no longer a need for a continuous night watch, and the parties stopped.

Another occasion associated with the farm year is picnic day, which, until recently, was celebrated the day after the crops were planted and the cotton chopped. On this day, a picnic was held by the farm laborers, the farm owners providing all of the food for the occasion except the fish for the fish stew. These were caught and dressed at Lowther's Lake, where the picnic was held. Now picnic day is simply a holiday for farm workers held on a certain day of the year whether or not the planting is finished, and the owners no longer provide food for the occasion.

Special family gatherings are also connected with the harvesting of certain crops. During watermelon season in July and early August, watermelon cuttings are often occasions for small family gatherings. Several family members will meet in the afternoon after work at Black Creek or in someone's yard. Hugh Jeffers recalled that for many years during the 1950s and 1960s, a watermelon cutting was a regular part of the day's activities for his family. His grandfather, Hugh Ervin, would call the homes of his children and grandchildren around noon and say, "Watermelon," then hang up, and the whole family would soon gather in his yard for the cutting.

Lucas, Frances, Ned, and Cullough Dargan pull their entire peanut crop for the "pindar boiling,"¹ which has been held in late summer for about twenty years. The peanuts are pulled before they reach maturity

and boiled in salted water. They are served out-of-doors with beer. All adults in the community, as well as friends and family from town and other parts of the state are invited. Children of these guests are automatically invited when they turn twenty-one.

This is one of the many parties which is family-centered but not limited exclusively to the family. For outside guests, however, it seems to be recognized as primarily a family occasion. I overheard a conversation once where someone misheard the name of the woman to whom she was being introduced and said, "Are you one of the Dargans and Ervins I've heard so much about?" "No," the woman replied, "I'm a Gardner, not a Dargan. But I'm invited to their pindar boiling every year. I guess I'm sort of adopted for the occasion."

Seasons also affect the family's calendar of events. Picnics are held throughout the year, except during the coldest months, but their location changes with the seasons. Fly Ervin Jeffers recalled that every spring her parents would take the children on a picnic in the woods near Back Swamp to look for wild flowers. Today, spring picnics near Lowther's Lake or Witherspoon Island to look for wild flowers are common. A letter from my father, dated March 22, describes some of the spring activities in the community:

We're having unusually warm weather still, with a few cool days. I don't like weather out-of-season. It's not a good thing in the long run. But it does have its pleasant features. We've been picnicing on Sundays for several weeks, and yesterday Ned and Cullough, Frank and Sarah, and Mamma and I spent the afternoon looking for wild flowers on the bluff

¹Pindar is an African word for peanuts used in the South.

along the river swamp. We've had two herring fries the past 2 weekends. A big one for the See-Off Mt. crowd & close-by cousins Saturday before last & a small one, just the DeWitts and the Parsons [friends], this past Saturday night.

In warmer weather, family picnics are held at one of the "creek places" on Black Creek. These places are usually clearings on the creek bank where benches, tables, and a bathhouse are built. Most also have a simple diving board, a rope swing, and steps leading to a high branch over the creek. At present, the family has two places on Black Creek where they gather for picnics and swimming -- one on Ervin property and one on Williamson property. For several years the Dargans also had a creek place, but this property was sold in the 1930s.

In the 1920s and 30s the Dargans, Ervins, and Howards had supper picnics on the creek regularly on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the summer. On Saturdays the men would go down early, put their boats in above the creek place, and fish down the creek, arriving in time for the picnic. Cousins living outside the community knew about the picnics and came when they were in the area.

Swimming and eating were the main activities at these picnics, but when the family gathered around the campfire at night, there was singing, reciting, and storytelling. Joe Dargan usually led the singing by "lining it out," singing a line which was then repeated by the group. The younger generation often performed plays, which many of them can still recite.

These picnics became irregular when the younger generation went off to school or got jobs outside the community and when the young men went to fight in World War II. They became more frequent when members of this

generation moved back to the community after the war. Over the past several years, they have been held every Sunday during the summer and on fine days during the spring and fall. When the leaves begin to turn in the fall, picnics move for a few weeks to Witherspoon Island, where the hardwood trees of the river swamp produce brilliant fall colors.

Family camping trips also change location with the seasons.

Summer camps, like summer picnics, are usually held on Black Creek, while fall camping is on the banks of Lowther's Lake, on Witherspoon Island, or on some other spot normally infested with mosquitoes during the summer. In the early 1900s family camping trips on Black Creek sometimes lasted as long as two weeks, with all generations, including babies as young as two weeks old, gathered for the occasion.

Separate camps for the men, women, boys, and girls are also held. The older men usually camp as a group to hunt or to fish. Young boys and young girls often camp separately in "private" camping spots. In the 1920s and 30s the young girls had several week-long camps with their mothers on Black Creek. They carried supplies down to the creek by ox cart or by car, and the men would help set up camp. The women who attended these camps as girls recalled some of the books they read aloud during the day when they were not swimming and some of the plays they performed at night. For the past several years these women have been holding an "Old Lady Camp" one weekend in the early fall or spring, where they sometimes perform the old plays from their childhood camping trips for entertainment.

When they reached high school age, the young boys and girls during

the 1920s and 30s had occasional camps together in the fall on Lowther's Lake. Friends from town were invited, and a few of the parents went as chaperones. Separate camps for adults and for younger members of the family are still fairly common in the community, but only a few large family camps have been held since the 1940s, and these have lasted only for a weekend. It is more difficult today to get a large group together for as long as two weeks.

Many special occasions are associated with the hunting and fishing seasons. The men, in particular, are together a great deal during these seasons; many of their favorite stories are based on experiences shared on hunting and fishing trips. Wild turkey are now scarce and fox hunts rather rare, but several kinds of game are still hunted: deer, quail, ducks, doves, and raccoons. Fishing is very popular, and the young people sometimes go frog gigging. Each of these kinds of game is often shared in a special family supper.

Herring fries are held during March when herring come up the river and small creeks to spawn. The herring are caught in gill nets stretched across the stream. In many parts of the state herring are scorned as food, but herring fries have been popular in the Pee Dee area since the early 1900s.

Family herring fries used to be held at one of the landings on Lowther's Lake. Ned Dargan described how the fires were built for the suppers:

We used to have herring fries down at the lake at the bottom of the hill. You know, it's a big steep hill. And we'd go down and start a big fire. We used to carry a mule down there to pull logs up to start a fire with. Just build a fire. Start a foundation, small light wood and coal in the fire, and

keep working up with smaller wood. And then get the mule there with big logs about, uh, two feet in diameter and about twelve feet long, and roll those up on the fire before sundown. And then would have a great big fire. The flames would go up about thirty feet in the air down in the woods. And with a big fire like that you didn't have any mosquitoes around. Right often in herring season the mosquitoes came at the same time. The mosquitoes came. With the big fire we didn't have any mosquitoes, and it didn't smoke either. If you have a big draft you didn't get the smoke in your eyes. It carries all the smoke up. Big draft. But then we had a little cooking fire off the side. We wouldn't cook on that big fire. Just get a shovel and get a big shovel full of red hot coals and then over the side have a cooking fire. And we'd really have a good parties. (T6)

The cooking was an integral part of these occasions, rather than something done before the guests arrived. The men usually do the cooking at these and other outdoor meals, and many take great pride in their special, often secret, receipts. After cleaning, the herring are gashed several times on each side so that they will cook thoroughly and the small bones can be eaten. The fish are then fried in very hot fat. They are served with hominy and hush puppies, a corn meal mixture dropped by spoonfuls into hot fat. Family herring fries are now held in someone's yard and tend to be smaller than the earlier parties.

In fall and winter, "bird suppers" are a regular event, the main dish being quail, doves, or ducks. The suppers are usually small, with no more than ten or twelve persons. For several years during the 1920s and 30s, Vannie Ervin and some of his cousins and friends cooked bird suppers every Saturday night during bird season:

Well, there was your Cousin Rick [McIver], I mean your Uncle Rick and me and Joe Lawton and Red Maxwell and sometimes his brother, Earl Maxwell, and Bob Alderman and Joe Hertoe. That was the main crowd. And sometimes Hugh would go with us; Hugh Dargan. Of course, he wasn't here like your Uncle Ned [Dargan]. And occasionally Ervin [Dargan] would go with us.

But he wasn't too close around. But we went every Saturday during bird season. And if we killed enough birds, well, we'd hurry in and send somebody to town to call and get dates, and we'd have a bird supper. But if we didn't kill enough, we'd just eat them ourselves. But Cousin Miriam [McIver] used to get so mad with us. I remember real well how mad she'd get because she'd say, "If I were a young lady I wouldn't give you a date, calling this late, for anything." But the girls liked the bird suppers.

And we'd cook them in the house. Mother would turn the kitchen over to us. And sometimes we'd cook them outdoors. I can remember a number of occasions cooking them in what we called the Wild Flower Garden, right back of my old house here. And we had the place fixed for cooking and building a fire. And I always believed in building two fires, a cooking fire and a seeing fire. And we built a big seeing fire or warming fire. And a little tiny cooking fire. But we cooked birds every Saturday night during season, I reckon, for ten years or fifteen. Just every -- started in high school and went right on up until we got married. In fact, after we got married. But we used to kill a lot of birds. (T11)

Other special suppers have become a traditional part of the family's calendar. Parties for older men in the family tend to be all-male occasions. One of these was the dining held every fall for Hugh Ervin by his wife and daughters. Most of the guests called it "Uncle Hugh's birthday party," but it was not held on his birthday. His daughter Margaret told how the dining was started:

Well, Mother started that when, uh, when we were little, having what we called "a dining" in those days. And she just said, that, you know, that all of his friends and brothers-in-law around who were then farming. And, so, she just, after the crops were mostly in, then she'd have them to spend the day and let them relax and talk over the crops and things. And, uh, some of her brothers as long as they were living. Of course, they died, your grandfather and Uncle Karl died real young. But Cousin Albert James and I don't know who else were some of the original ones, probably Uncle Armstrong Howard and Cousin Ben Williamson and just the men in the neighborhood. Mr. Jim McIntosh was one of Father's real close friends, and of course he was Aunt Rose's brother. He was included.

And then as, uh, later on when the sons and nephews grew up, well, then he wanted to invite them, particularly the ones who were interested in farming. Finally got to where he invited a lot of his nephews and in-laws and real nephews too. And then after we got old enough to help we helped put it on. (T8)

Changes

Some of the changes in the patterns of leisure over the generations reflect historical changes which have influenced the lives of family members living in the community. One change has been the mobility brought by the automobile and improved roads. Families in the 1800s and early 1900s often had overnight house parties when they invited friends over for a party, since the guests could not be expected to make the long trip home after the party. A large number of weekend guests was expected during this period before automobiles and hard-surfaced roads. In a journalistic style typical of the period, a local newspaper described a house party at Mary and William Edwin Dargan's home in 1905:

A jolly house party has for the last week been entertained at the hospitable home of Mr. and Mrs. W.E. Dargan in this county. Mr. and Mrs. Dargan are an ideal host and hostess, they have an ideal home for a house party and the guests are completely charmed.

These gay young people are having pleasures of all kinds furnished them and it is needless to say that everyone is delighted.

Riding, driving, bathing, dancing, a walk or talk on the lawn under shade trees, in forests, field or garden, with much to eat and only enough sleep to keep one fresh is the order of the day, and there is hardly enough time in twenty-four hours to get through the routine of pleasures.

Long visits from relatives and friends were much more common during this period than today. Unmarried relatives, in particular, lived for months, sometimes a year, with different relatives and sometimes became permanent members of their brother's or sister's household. The women

2 "A Day in the Country -- The Riverdale Section -- Mr. W. E. Dargan's Fine Farm and Home," New Era, 17 Aug. 1905, n. pag.

frequently earned their keep by sewing and tutoring their nieces and nephews. Family diaries and letters are full of descriptions of the visits between relatives in different parts of the state and the region.

Other historical changes have had their effect on the way leisure time has been spent in the community. During the aftermath of the Civil War, when economic conditions were poor throughout the South, there was no money to spend on recreation. This family, like many others, had to create its own diversions, using the resources at hand.

Around the turn of the century, when the economy was booming and cotton prices were high, more money was spent on "outside" entertainment. Darlington supported two large hotels, and plays from New York and other cities frequently played in the town theatre. Music concerts and formal dances were popular. Family members participated in these activities and also had many of their own concerts and dances in the community. The Williamsons had concerts by local musicians on Sundays evenings in their home.

With the Depression of the 1930s, much of the outside entertainment stopped, and the family again had to rely on their own resources for recreation. Even today, however, when better financial conditions and better transportation make it possible to seek entertainment outside the community, the family still tends to create its own leisure entertainment. They do go outside the community for part of their recreation, but most of their leisure activities are family-centered and family-created.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the rural districts in the 1800s and early 1900s were viable communities, with churches and schools

as centers of social activity. Leisure activities were community-oriented rather than family-oriented. Recalling the pastimes of their youth, family members who grew up in Back Swamp in the late 1800s, describe church and school picnics which included all white families in the community, related or not. Taffy-pulling parties and plays at the church and schoolhouse were common.

It was in the early 1900s, after the two Dargan-Ervin marriages united the two families, that their social activities became more self-consciously family activities. Some of the relatives in Back Swamp who were not part of both families, the Fulton Ervin family, for example, continued to participate in church and school activities on into the 1930s. Their Ervin-Dargan cousins, however, seldom participated in these activities, because, as they explained to me, they were too busy doing things with their cousins.

Now there are no rural schools in the three districts which the family community intersects and no churches claiming the family's membership. With the loss of these centers of social activity came a loss of community feeling, which was felt even more as families who had lived in the area for generations began to move away. These self-consciously family-centered occasions may be, in part, an attempt to maintain a sense of community. The family, rather than the institutions of church and school, supplies the needs for organized recreation and becomes the organizing principle of the community.

The move toward increasingly family-centered activities is well illustrated by the changes in the baseball and softball games played in the community over the years. During the late 1800s, baseball games

were held in a pasture near the Willfamsons' house. The team, named the Hurricanes for the hurricane, or uprooted tree, near the playing field, was made up of persons living mostly on the eastern side of Darlington County. They played teams from other parts of the county and from different parts of the state. Frank Williamson, whose father and grandfather played on the team, guessed that the games ended around 1900.

"To hear them talk you'd think they played every day," Frank said. "But I think they probably played every Saturday afternoon."

In the 1920s and 30s baseball games were held every Sunday afternoon in spring and summer in Hugh Ervin's pasture. Friends from Darlington and Florence were invited to play, and "the country" (the family) would play "the town." Frequently, many friends and relatives would gather to watch the games, which became so competitive that Hugh Ervin, the official umpire, finally made the group divide the teams differently. Because the games were played on Sunday, which shocked the more rigid Protestants, the family named the games "The Heathen Nation." Ervin Dargan explained how the name was taken from an Episcopal hymn recited by Mingo, a man who lived and worked on one of the family farms. Mingo modified a hymn describing Christianity's reign of glory to a verse condemning the breaking of the Sabbath:

And he would recite, he would recite things that -- I've seen them in the Episcopal hymnbook since then, about the Heathen Nation. I remember that one. He'd start out with a little preface before he would recite it. He'd say this was about the Heathen Nation playing baseball on Sunday. And that's why we called that big baseball game we used to have down at Uncle Hugh's home on Sunday. We called them "The Heathen Nation." We'd play, "the country" would play "the town." We'd do that for several years before we started playing tennis.... He would recite this thing:

I see the Heathen Nation bending before the God,
The new nation and commotion prepare for Zion War.

He didn't get it quite right. But you can recognize it.

Still not, until the holy reclaim the Lord has come.

And this is still -- Some of the words are right and some aren't.

I see a, I see a "something" from afar,
By face and grace do bring it near,
When that celestial day shall rise,
And all the nations army shine,
The rover victory through the skies,
And glory shall resign.

It's "reign" in the book. (Tl)

These games stopped when tennis became the popular sport. The tennis matches also brought town friends out to the community to participate, and many of the activities surrounding the Sunday games, such as a party on the lawn at night, continued.

Family ball games were started again in the summer of 1975 after a successful game of softball at the Summer Games. The players decided to make the game a regular event, and now during the summer it is held every Sunday after the picnic at Black Creek. These games are played in the pasture beside Ervin and Esther Dargan's house, and the teams are "the Dargans" and "the Ervins." The Ervin team is made up of the Fulton Ervin family and the Howards. The Dargan team is made up of the Dargans, Williamsons, Jeffers, and Swinks. Although a few friends from town occasionally come to play, the games are family-centered and tend to be family-exclusive.

The emphasis on family in these games is apparent not only in the selecting of teams -- teams will often argue over a good player by trying to prove closer kinship their side when it is necessary to move a player to even up the number on each team -- but also in the playful insults used throughout the game. Playful taunts, such as, "Y'all could do better than putting an Ervin on third base, couldn't you?"

or "There's a Dargan up to bat, outfield move in," are common.

Invitations

The ability of individuals to choose from a range of possible family groupings can be seen clearly in the organization of family pastimes. The number of recognized kin is so large that it is unwieldy as a basis for social gatherings. Two hundred relatives will not fit around a dining room table. Thus, it becomes necessary to use a smaller sense of family group for certain occasions. This is evident in the Christmas dinners, which traditionally have been occasions for the extended family. As the generations increase and the size becomes unmanageable, these gatherings tend to break up into smaller extended groups.

At any family gathering it is important to make clear the criteria you are using for inviting guests even if this is not the primary motivation. Descent from a common ancestor is seldom the basis for a family gathering beyond a few generations, but common ancestry may be used to define eligibility for inclusion in an occasion, even though all those invited may not be expected to participate. The real purpose of the Summer and Winter Games, as I mentioned earlier, is to bring together the children and grandchildren of a group of first and double-first cousins who were close friends while growing up in the community. Naming common ancestry rather than friendship as the criterion for inclusion in the gathering avoids hurting the feelings of relatives who are not invited.

For most traditional family celebrations family members know which sense of family group is being used. Invitations are usually sent out,

except for weekly picnics and Christmas Day celebrations, but they are not always necessary. By mistake, Ida Dargan Ervin, one of the few remaining members of her generation, was left off the invitation list to a family wedding. She went anyway, as she told another family member, because she knew the family intended for her to come.

When new occasions or parties are held for the first time, however, the host and hostess usually define which group of family members they intend to invite: "close cousins," "Ervin cousins," "cousins in the community," etc. Occasionally, feelings are hurt, but for the most part family members recognize that limitations have to be made or, as one family member said, "Pretty soon it's going to be like Adam and Eve's reunion."

As long as the sense of family used in a particular occasion is understood, those not invited will not be offended. Any inconsistency, however, often has to be justified in some way. For one family wedding, word was sent out that only the "immediate family," in this case meaning parents and brothers and sisters, would be invited. The groom, however, wanted to invite two first cousins with whom he was particularly close friends. So that other first cousins would not be offended, these cousins were given jobs working in the kitchen, signifying that they were workers, not regular guests.

These patterns of leisure show how important tradition is to the family. Family members are interested not only in preserving old traditions but also in creating new ones. Some of their gatherings are self-conscious attempts to preserve the closeness of the family and its way of life. Family gatherings are also a way of making living in the community

attractive to younger generations, encouraging them to come back home to live.

These gatherings are both occasions for storytelling and sources of material for family stories. Through their close association, cousins become friends and share common experiences which form the core of their stories and other forms of verbal art. The closer the group, the more they develop a collective knowledge of shared experiences, of stock traits of individuals and groups within the family, and a shared esthetic for effective dramatic performance. This shared knowledge and esthetic and its expression in verbal art is the focus of the remaining chapters.



Fig. 5 William Edwin and Mary Hart Dargan family -- [1898]
 Standing: Edna, Henry, Karl, Benton, Edwin, Walter, Ida.
 Seated: Liza, Joseph, Mary Hart, William Edwin.



Fig. 6 Dargan family -- Christmas Day, [1937]



Fig. 7 Hugh and Ida Dargan Ervin's 60th wedding anniversary -- Oct. 1966.



Fig. 8 Hugh and Ida Dargan Ervin, their daughters, sons, and sons and daughters-in-law -- [1960].



Fig. 9 A play at Lone Hickory, North Carolina
-- [1922]. Left to right: Liza Dargan Ware,
Anne Ware, Mary Ware, Ida Ervin, Sarah Dargan.



Fig. 10 The Sisters' House Party, Pawley's Island, South Carolina
-- [1960]. Front: Edwina Dargan Boatright, Mildred Dargan Welch.
Back: Sarah Dargan Williamson, Louisa Ervin Spann, Bess Dargan
Baron, Margaret Ervin.



Fig. 11. Square dance -- December 1976. Front couple:
Caroline Hawkins Dargan, Tommy Brown.



Fig. 12 Christmas dinner -- December 25, 1976. Seated: Mary
Hart Dargan McIver, Lucas Dargan, Claude Edwards. Standing
front: Ned Dargan.



Fig. 13 Barbecue and sweet potatoes, the Winter Games -- 1975. James Swink and John Jeffers.



Fig. 14 Skeet shooting contest, the Winter Games -- 1975. William Rambo, Frank Williamson, John Gregg McMaster.



Fig. 15 Corn shucking contest, the Winter Games -- 1975.



Fig. 16 Corn shucking contest, the Winter Games -- 1976.
Front: Vannie Ervin. Back: Benton Dargan, Bright
Williamson.



Fig. 17 Tug-of-war, the Winter Games -- 1976.



Fig. 18 Tug-of-war, the Winter Games -- 1976.



Fig. 19 Turkey shoot, the Winter Games -- 1975. Norma Campbell and Vannie Ervin.



Fig. 20 Winner of the turkey shoot, the Winter Games -- 1976. Tim Rambo,



Fig. 21 Tennis match, the Winter Games -- 1975.



Fig. 22 Sunday afternoon softball -- 1976.



Fig. 23 Asking the blessing, fall picnic at Black Creek -- [1974]. Rick McIver.



Fig. 24 Picnic line, Fourth of July picnic at Black Creek -- 1978.



Fig. 25 Eating dinner, Fourth of July picnic at Black Creek -- 1978.



Fig. 26 Swimming in the creek, Fourth of July picnic -- 1978.

CHAPTER V

VERBAL ART: PATTERNS OF PERFORMANCE

Folklorists, in recent years, have turned away from an emphasis on folklore as isolated text toward a study of folklore as a process of communicating, as an event. Central to this new emphasis is the concept of performance, which was summarized by Richard Bauman in a special issue of the Journal of American Folklore:

Without attempting to speak for the authors, it may be useful to indicate the principal concerns that appear to us to emerge from the work as a whole. Of these, the most comprehensive is a full-scale and highly self-conscious reorientation from the traditional focus upon folklore as "item" — the things of folklore — to a conceptualization of folklore as "event" — the doing of folklore. In particular, there is an emphasis upon performance as an organizing principle that comprehends within a single conceptual framework artistic act, expressive form, and esthetic response, and that does so in terms of locally defined, culture specific categories and contexts.¹

This chapter uses the performance model to analyze verbal art in the family setting. Its emphasis is on the expressive forms, the relationship between performer and audience, the styles of performance, the recognition of expertise and ownership, the role-playing of narrators, and the uses of verbal art among family members. Instead of focusing on specific performances, I have drawn on my observations of these events to isolate general patterns.

¹ Richard Bauman, "Introduction," Journal of American Folklore, 84 (1971), v.

The examples of verbal art within the family tradition which I have used are not all part of a repertoire of traditional items of fixed form; they arise, instead, from a shared knowledge of common experiences, values, attitudes, and rules for artistic performance. Although these experiences may have a tradition in the minds of those who share this knowledge, they often find their expression in different forms: names, imitations, short expressions, descriptions, and narratives. These forms are a means of shaping experiences into artistic expression, and they depend for their effect on their listeners sharing the esthetic and knowledge which gave birth to them. Thus, new items are continually being added to the store; yet all are part of the family tradition.

Expressive Forms

Place names given to features of family land are an important part of the family's verbal traditions, since many of these names are perpetuated only through oral tradition and are known and used only by family members. Family land is made more familiar by the names attached to its features and divisions. Ponds, creek, branches, hills, swamps, and low places in the land all have names, as well as prominent features, such as the high bluff above Lowther's Lake, called "Lover's Leap." Tracts of land and fields have names, which are useful in discussing the land and are also important as reminders of the past, since many are named for former owners. Part of one farm is known as "The Fludd Place" and another part as "The Siskron Place."

Fields also bear the names of former owners or of tenant families

who lived near them. Sometimes these names are used as evidence that a particular family lived on that piece of land. Names such as "Gin House Field" and "Spring House Field" indicate where former buildings were located. Some names are common to several farms; for example, "New Ground Field," a field newly cleared, and "Boneyard Field," a field near the woods where the bodies of dead animals were taken. Names such as "Indigo Field" are reminders of former crops grown in the area. "The Graveyard Field," on Ervin Dargan's land is thought to cover a graveyard. Workers used to refuse to work in this field before daylight or after dark, because they believed that the spirits spooked the mules.

These names are in general use in the family, but a few names have special significance and are used only by some family members. Rosa Dargan named a neighboring farm, "Naboth's Vinyard,"² because her husband "coveted" it for many years. Rosa's two sons finally bought the land in the 1940s, and only they use the term. Hunters in the family refer to a tree which stands in the river swamp as "Hampton Oak." It was there that Governor Wade Hampton, while on a deer hunt with several men in the family, fell asleep on his stand. By using these names family members can demonstrate a sense of belonging to the group of persons who know the reference of the name.

Nicknames also draw on shared knowledge and shared experiences. The use of those names known only within the family strengthens family identity, since often only family members know its origin and to whom it refers.

² A Biblical reference to Naboth whose vinyard was coveted by Jezebel. See Kings I:21.

Most family members also have nicknames given to them by outsiders, such as their school friends, and sometimes these, too, are adopted by the family.

These names have various origins. A large number are based on characteristic traits. Ervin Dargan, for example, named his son, Benton, "Zig," because with his big jaws he resembled "Ziggy," a Dick Tracy cartoon character. Other nicknames refer to a particular incident in a person's life. Billy Howard was called "Preacher" from the time when as a child he wore a black suit, which people claimed made him resemble a preacher. Children's mispronunciations of given names are a common source of family nicknames. "Beela" for Sarah Williamson and "Beebo" for her brother, Ben, both were taken from a younger brother's attempts to say their given names.

A few nicknames have undergone several transformations. Often only a few of the closest family members or friends remember the original form. The youngest Hugh Dargan is nicknamed "Tug," a corruption of the affectionate term, "Sug," an abbreviation of "Sugar." The youngest Mildred Dargan was nicknamed "Happy," because she was born on New Year's Day. The name became shortened to "Hap," and as she grew older and a woman who worked for the family began to address her as "Miss Hap," it became "Mishap."

Some family members are considered experts in giving nicknames. Of these, a few have their own style of nicknaming. Jake Ervin's nicknames, for example, are playful distortions of the person's given name: "Sarafied" for Sarah Dargan, "Jackstone" for Jackie Adams, and "Aggravation" for Agnes Ervin. Probably because Jake, like others in the family, has developed his own style of nicknaming, he is the only one to use the

names. Others in the family know the nicknames and to whom they refer, but they are generally considered Jake's own names.

Other examples of restricted use of nicknames are those used by only one age group of cousins for their friends. Since childhood, Ned Dargan has been called "Fish" by his group of friends, because he enjoys fishing so much. Margaret Ervin, whose nickname, "Suter," is more commonly used in the family, is called "General" by her sisters and cousins, because, being the oldest, she tended to give them orders. Vannie Ervin was nicknamed "Boll Weevil," later shortened to "Weevil," when a cousin found a boll weevil in his white hair. His wife claims that this was the first boll weevil found in Darlington County.

Family members, particularly school children, also have nicknames which only their friends outside the family know and use. I have such nicknames, and I assume others in the family do.

Some of the family nicknames may be used only occasionally in specific situations, to tease or to express affection, but others become so permanent that they replace the person's given name. The latter often become known and used outside the family group. When this happens the nickname ceases to function solely as an esoteric family expression.

Words and phrases coined or given special meaning by members of the family are the most highly esoteric of its traditional lore. As with some nicknames, private words and expressions are not always shared by the family as a whole but often exist among smaller groups of family members: a generation of cousins who were close, a family household, an extended family group, or two or three relatives who shared the experience from which the expression originated.

Two sisters share an expression which refers to the time Maggie, a

family servant, who was preparing a meal for a special occasion, ruined a bowl of shrimp and exclaimed, "Do Jesus, I've done shit and stepped back in it." Since then, when the sisters are together and one makes a mistake which might get her into trouble, they say, "Oh Maggie," a private reference to Maggie's original expression. The remark summarizes a doubly-bad situation, and thus is useful as a warning, since it recalls the whole situation and compares it to the present predicament.

An expression used by one family household refers to the time several of the Ervin sisters drove their cousins and boy friends to the river where the boys were beginning a boat trip. Just as they were leaving, one of the boys got out of the boat, kissed his sister on the cheek and said, "Good-bye, Sis. Tell Ma the boat floats." Now, when a family member calls or writes home from a trip, "Tell Ma the boat floats," means that everything is all right.

Some expressions may be used by only one person, but they are considered "family expressions," since everyone knows how they are used and where they originated. Mildred Ervin Dargan, for example, adopted a local man's use of "financially" where he should have used "finally." Everyone could appreciate her use of the word, but no one else adopted it.

The mispronunciation or misuse of a word is a common origin of these private expressions. As with nicknames, children's mispronunciations of words in their early efforts to talk supply many of these special words. In one family household "milk a man Jesus" is substituted for milk of magnesia, because one family member pronounced it that way as a child. In another, "innocent coffee" is used instead of instant coffee.

The family's fondness for words misused is the source of many family expressions. Some of these did not originate with family members but were incorporated into the family tradition by relatives who heard the expressions used. Although their use is patronizing toward those whose use of language is thought to reflect a lack of formal education, particularly the blacks and whites who were tenants or sharecroppers in the area, they are told in much the same manner as similar expressions taken from family members. The use of "It's a misery to me" refers to a remark made by a woman who worked for the Hugh Ervin family when the family first got electricity: "It's a misery to me how the same thing can make heat and make ice too." From a man who rented land from the family, one family household took the term "eye-dentist" for optometrist.

What the family calls "quotes" often has an aphoristic quality. The term "quote," as used by the family, usually refers to a statement which can stand on its own, such as the quote, "There's nothing as cheap as good manners." But sometimes short anecdotes which place the quote in a specific time and place are also referred to as "quotes." Mr. McIver Williamson, for example, is quoted as saying, "If you can't plant oats in October, wait until next October." This "quote" is usually given out of context and applied to a present situation, but it is also told in anecdote form. A farmer asks Mr. McIver when to plant oats, and he replies, "October." "When is the next best time?" asks the farmer. "Next October," Mr. McIver answers. This time the quote is set in a particular time and place, but is still called a "quote," probably because the story's purpose is to "quote" what Mr. Williamson said.

A form of verbal art often used in the family, which I have called "narrative descriptions," is not set in a particular time. It usually

involves elaborate descriptions of something which happened over and over in a particular place with particular characters. The eccentric behavior of family characters, the patterned behavior of persons who have become "set in their ways," or the routine behavior of any family member are common subjects for these descriptions, which are often highly dramatic. Vannie Ervin's description of the early morning routine of Mr. Clopton, a tobacco specialist, who lived with the family during tobacco season, is a good example of this form of verbal art:

He and Deacon Joe stayed in the room on the northwest corner, and Edwin and I stayed on the southwest corner. But Mr. Clopton used to get up every morning before day, and I can hear him right now. Well, he always wore little hard sole slippers. And he'd come down the hall skipping. He always ran. [imitates skipping] And, uh, would come to my door, knock on the door way fore day, "Wake up, Van. Wake up like a man. Go play in the sand." [spoken in rhythmical chant] And he'd skip on 'cross to the bathroom. And you'd hear him washing his face, "Br-r-r-r-r." [slaps hands] Splashing the water and patting his hands, washing his face. Then he'd go skipping down the steps. And the gate -- You don't remember the old gin house,³ I don't reckon.

Lucas Dargan: Yes, I believe it was about between--

Vannie: About where Georgie's house is.

Lucas: It was between Ned's house and the commissary.⁴

Vannie: Yes, it was a big old building. But, anyhow, the fence came right off from the gin house, and he'd push the gate open and wait to pull it shut. And he'd say, [claps hands, inaudible] And you'd hear the gate shut. And then he'd crow, "Urk-urk-ur-ur-r-r," [imitates rooster's crow] [laughter] and all the roosters would crow. That was every morning. Just never failed. That same routine. Skip down the hall, wake me up, wash his face, make a lot of fuss, wake everybody in the house, and then he'd go on out the back door and shut the back gate, and then he'd crow. [laughter] (T9)

³ Building where cotton was ginned.

⁴ Store run by farm owner, where family members and farm workers could buy supplies.

Family members have no name for this form of verbal art, although they do appear to recognize it as a unit. Occasionally they are called "stories," but most family members seem to distinguish between descriptions and "stories," the latter being set in a particular time and place. Tug Dargan distinguished between the two forms in the following narration:

Well, these are two classics. Well, one is a story. He [Hugh Dargan] said, uh, how he, he [McIver Williamson] didn't-- Any car he'd get he'd put a, he'd take the windshield out. Like I don't know what kind of glass they had. I don't reckon they had regular glass like we've got glass. But, and he'd take, put a board where the windshield was and cut a little hole out. Because he didn't, he thought it was too close to be to glass. And he'd just, you know, ride up and down the road in his car with his wooden windshield with a little hole cut in it.

Uh, and this is a story told about--I can't remember the name of whoever's garage it was--but he just took his car to a garage and went up to the man. Said, uh, "Reckon you got time to help me, help me fix my car? I need some work on my car." The man said, "Yeah." He said, "See that fender." And the fender was bent. He said, "Yes, it's dented. You want me to straighten it out for you?" He said, "No. Just bend the other one in to look just, just so it will match." And the man just started out and bent it in, because he knew that was what McIver Williamson wanted. [laughs] (T5)

The first narrative, which Tug does not consider a story, describes something which Mr. McIver Williamson did over and over, replace the glass windshields in his new cars with wooden ones. It does not describe an incident which occurred at a particular time. The second narrative, which he does call a "story," describes a specific incident. Other family members also make this distinction.

Imitations are a highly dramatic form of verbal art which the family enjoys. Usually these imitations take off on the characteristic voice quality, speech patterns, gestures, and habitual behavior of certain family members. They may involve only a short imitative gesture during conversation, but often they are elaborate performances which incorporate

gestures and a speech which others would recognize as typical of the person being imitated. Good imitators are frequently asked to "do an imitation" of someone whom they are known to imitate well.

These forms of verbal art: names, expressions, quotes, imitations, descriptive narratives, and stories are vehicles for expressing the experiences and knowledge which family members share. Some experiences are tied to one form, while others are expressed in various forms, which may exist concurrently in tradition. It is quite common for the same experience to be told in both narrative and descriptive form. Some members of the family, for example, tell a story of how Mr. McIver Williamson offered a visitor one of his hams and when the guest said, "You shouldn't do that," took the gift back. Other family members tell the incident in the form of a description, suggesting that it was something which happened frequently.

Family expressions are a particularly clear example of the change from one form to another. For family members or outsiders who do not know the meaning of a particular expression, its origin might be explained in anecdote form. The explanation is unnecessary for those who share the expression. Many private expressions were originally made known to family members in anecdote form. In a close-knit group, repetition of the same anecdote would soon become boring; therefore, the change to a shorter form is common. Its use gives the group which knows the point of reference the pleasure of sharing their private knowledge.

Lawrence G. Small discussed the frequency of the change from narrative to short expression in a Newfoundland community and suggested that this in-group vocabulary plays an important role in the personal

relationships in the community:

Given this situation we get an example of a specific need for recurrent talk on the part of individuals and so they adopt short cultural forms to be used during normal conversation. These linguistic constructions become models governing interpersonal behavior from time to time.⁵

A form of verbal art which shows a more conscious transfer of material from one form of expression to another is the family play. Family members recall putting on plays when they were children, which were based on family anecdotes about aunts, uncles, and cousins. Favorite family expressions were also incorporated into these plays. These plays and other forms of verbal art show how the family's repertoire exists not of fixed forms but of traditional material which can easily be expressed in several forms.

Sources

Verbal art in the family is not limited to an oral tradition; it draws both from oral and written sources, and there is a continual exchange between the two. Material may pass from oral to written and back to oral again. Many personal experiences and family tales first heard orally have been recorded in diaries, letters, family records, and reminiscent histories, which have been kept and read by succeeding generations of the family. The family also draws material from reminiscent histories written by local writers outside the family, and these they

⁵ Lawrence G. Small, "Traditional Expressions in a Newfoundland Community: Genre Change and Functional Variability," Lore and Language, 2 (1975), 15.

read with special attention, often incorporating family stories found in them into their own repertoires.

Examples of material taken from a written source are the narratives Lucas Dargan tells about his great-great uncle, Jeremiah Dargan. Only when I recorded the narratives on tape did I discover that he had learned them from a paper written by a nephew of Jeremiah Dargan.⁶

Lucas began in the family tradition of giving genealogical data on the main character of the narrative:

Well, Uncle Jerry was one of my great-grandfather Dargan's eight brothers. There were nine sons in that family. And he was the schoolteacher. Of the nine sons there were three doctors, three lawyers, two preachers, and one country schoolteacher. Uncle Jerry was the country schoolteacher. And, uh, he had, he had been to West Point, but while at West Point he developed some difficulty with some officer, and the officer called him a liar out on the drill field. Well, he felt that was something he couldn't take. So he got a classmate to go with him and stand outside the officer's door. And he knocked on the door and went in and gave him a beating. And, of course, he knew that was verboten in military, in any military organization. So then he went back to his room and gathered up all his things and headed home. And, uh, which was a long way, you know, [laughs] in those days especially. And he wrote to President Andrew Jackson explaining the incident, explaining the circumstances, and asking for an honorable discharge. Well, you know, that sort of thing, that was Jackson's sort of thing. [laughs] So, he not only arranged an honorable discharge, he offered to reinstate him at the military academy. But he didn't go back, and he, I don't know whether he ever went to school anywhere else or not. (T15)

I have seen the original document, which the author included in a reminiscent history of his home, and Lucas has included the basic facts but has presented them in his own style.

⁶ E.C. Dargan, "Of Jeremiah Eccles Dargan, Brother of J.O.B. Dargan," TS. Libba Dargan Sams in Clemson, South Carolina, owns a copy of the paper.

"Quotes" are also frequently taken from written sources. Lucas Dargan enjoys quoting his great-great-great-great grandfather, Thomas Taylor, who said in reference to the sale of his farm as the site for the state capitol, Columbia, "I swapped a damn good plantation for a damn poor town." Lucas learned the quote from a book of anecdotes of Columbia.⁷ Lucas and other family members feel free to use these written documents as source material with or without giving the source. What is important is that the material is about the family and that they feel that it is authentic.

Features of Style

Although performance styles vary from one narrator to another, there are certain recognizable features of style which are generally used by everyone in the family. Family storytellers use a variety of devices, such as repeating words and phrases, pausing, and changing tempo to emphasize important parts of the story. Gestures and imitations of the characters in the story also dramatize the performance.

The predominant characteristic of the family's storytelling, however, is the conscious striving to make the performance believable, which is reflected in the choice of material and in the manner of presentation. Narrators relating material second or third-hand attempt to authenticate their narration by telling where they got their information and who witnessed the event described. References to the person who first told the

⁷ Nell S. Graydon, Tales of Columbia (Columbia, S.C.: R.L. Bryan Co., 1964), pp. 15-16.

story are usually made throughout the performance, as in the following example where I have underlined each of the references to the original source:

Lucas Dargan: Now Manda was saying that Whitfield [Howard] hunted with Uncle Joe [Dargan] a good deal. I'm a little surprised at that.

Ervin Dargan: Yeah, I remember -- Yeah, well, Whitfield was real little and was real young. And I remember Bill [Howard] said one time, said Whitfield went with him [Joe Dargan] and just as soon as they got lost -- Bill might have told you this one -- said soon as they left the place they got lost as usual. Stayed lost for several hours. And Bill said he ran up on them on one of the lakes. Said Whitfield was so glad to see him he ran 'cross the lake like a didapper. Just [imitates motion of flapping wings]. [laughter]

Lucas: Manda, you know what a didapper is? A didapper is a pied-billed grebe. And fly -- all the grebes -- it takes them a good while to get up. They just [laughs] run across the water flapping their wings [laughs] "Came across like a didapper." [laughs] (T15)

Narrators relating their own experiences often attest to the clarity of their memories by focusing on particulars to give the listeners the impression that since the smallest details of the scene are remembered then surely the more important features are accurate. Special attention is given to the weather, the landscape, the surroundings, and the time of day of the scene in which the narrator sets the story. Although these details may not be crucial to the story, they are frequently emphasized as much, or more, than the important details.

During an interview, Vannie Ervin tried to convince Lucas Dargan that, although he was a young boy when Lucas's father died, he still remembered his uncle's riding ability and his horse, Tennessee. He focused, however, not on his memory of the rider so much as his memory

of the picket fence from where he watched his uncle ride:

I remember real well, uh, being over there playing with Ned, and there was a picket fence, a beautiful picket fence, came to the road around Ned's house. I mean, the picket fence all the way around Ned's house. And there was a road that came from that old store by the old gin house. And I can remember Ned, me and Ned playing on the picket fence, trying to walk the little rails inside the pickets. And Uncle Edwin coming dashing down that road on Tennessee.... But I remember Tennessee. Tennessee was just a beautiful horse. And Uncle Edwin was such a good rider. I can see him right now coming around that road outside the fence. (T9)

Letters, photographs, books, and other memorabilia are often used to document a narrative. Often these objects remind someone of a story, but they are also brought out during a performance to illustrate a story or give proof of facts mentioned. During an interview with Vannie Ervin, he brought out a box of photographs to illustrate a family party he had been describing. As he looked through the photographs, he was reminded of other family occasions and of stories to go with them. A picture of several cousins and friends in a boat on Lowther's Lake reminded him of the time a boat with the same passengers turned over in the lake on a cold winter afternoon; a photograph of four cousins standing next to a tent pitched on the beach called forth memories of that group's annual camping trips.

The editors of Family Folklore, a collection of material gathered by members of the Family Folklore Program of the Festival of American Folklife, made a similar observation about the use of family photographs. They suggested that the self-image which families portray in their verbal art is related to that which they portray in their collected photographs:

We began to see that the home photographer may be analogous

to the home storyteller, and that photographs were the visual counterpart of stories and other verbal forms of folklore. Whereas family stories represent one way in which families "image" themselves verbally, family photographs represent the way this is done visually.⁸

Karen Becker Ohrn suggested that the family photograph collection also plays an important role in passing on family traditions:

The family photograph collection serves as an "archives" of family life -- a way of remembering the way people and events used to be, and also a way of passing on these memories to other members of the family.

Both of these observations apply as well to my own family's use of their photograph collections and other memorabilia. A family portrait of Alexander Gregg, a bishop of the Episcopal diocese of Texas, often prompts a story of one of his adventures in Texas. The story goes that the famous bandit, Jesse James, held up a stagecoach on which Alexander was a passenger and robbed him of his watch. When Jesse discovered later whom he had robbed, he returned the watch with apologies. Another family treasure, a silver cup inscribed from Sarah Wallace to her great-granddaughter, Rosa Evans, is used when quoting Mrs. Wallace as saying, "Arise my daughter and go to your daughter, for your daughter's daughter has a daughter."¹⁰ On several occasions, the cup has prompted Frances Dargan to tell her daughters the quote as she gave them the background of

⁸ Holly Cutting-Baker et al., Family Folklore (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1976), p. 69.

⁹ Karen Becker Ohrn, "The Photoflow of Family Life: A Family's Photograph Collection," in Saying Cheese: Studies in Folklore and Visual Communication, ed. Steven Ohrn and Michael E. Bell (Bloomington, Ind.: Folklore Forum: Bibliographic and Special Series, No. 13, 1975), p. 27.

¹⁰ I have seen this quote elsewhere given as a traditional family expression, but I cannot recall the source.

several pieces of family silver. On other occasions, the cup has been brought out to illustrate the quote during a discussion of the Wallace family.

A few family treasures seem to have been saved specifically for storytelling. I was present when Frank Williamson told of the time during the late 1800s when Governor Wade Hampton was visiting Mr. McIver Williamson for a hunting trip in the river swamp. As Mr. Williamson drove Governor Hampton through the community he blew a bugle to call people out of their homes to meet the governor. At one point the bugle fell, and the carriage ran over it. Governor Hampton remarked, "McIver, if you get any more sound out of that bugle it will be a flat note." Young McIver Williamson brought out the flattened bugle as his cousin Frank told the story, and he went on to tell another story involving a cork found in Governor Hampton's boot. As he told the story he reached in a drawer and showed us the cork.

One of the most noticeable features of the family's performance style is the concern with establishing the names of the characters involved, where they lived, and what their relationship is to the present members of the family, particularly those who make up the audience. One family member said that he would not tell a story if he knew nothing about the persons involved.

Often the narrator and the listeners collaborate to establish the information necessary to appreciate the story:

Vannie Ervin: But there were two doctor ancestors living near Timmons ville. This is no good unless I remember the names.

Margaret Ervin: Your mother can tell you.

Vannie: Well, anyhow, they, somebody was real sick. And

they got this doctor out there, and he said, "Well, I just can't make the decision. This is something that I should have consultation about." And said, "I would like to call another doctor." And so one of the neighbors said, "Well, there's a doctor that lives across the swamp over there." And so they sent somebody to get him, and when they sent and got him, he was his own brother. And they had both been in this country for thirty years --

Lucas Dargan: Oh, these are the brothers Flinn.

Vannie: Flinn, that's right.

Lucas: That's who they were. One of them had just come down from Lancaster, probably, and sent for our great-grandfather. He settled here, and his brother settled around Lancaster.

Vannie: Uh huh, but they didn't know they were living a few miles apart.

Margaret: Mrs. Ervin tells us that story every time we go to church, but I didn't know who they were. They were the Flinns.

Lucas: Flinns.

Vannie: Flinns, yeah. I believe that's right. [to AD] That's why I wanted you to bring Luke with you.

Margaret: [to LD] Your great-grandfather and her [AD] great-great grandfather.

Lucas: Yeah, her great-great grandfather and his brother. And they both were immigrants. Came from Ireland. Came from Scotland, actually. They were Irish, but they went to school at Edinburgh. Studied medicine at Edinburgh, at the university there.

Amanda: Who's that, Aunt Ida that usually tells you that?

Vannie: Yeah, that's one of her favorite stories. But, uh, it must be true. (T9)

Expertise

Several family members are recognized as expert storytellers. Since the majority of stories told in the family are based on personal

experiences, a storyteller is judged not only on his skill in performing a story, but also on his ability to select incidents from his own experiences which would be of interest to his audience, on his choosing the most appropriate material for a particular situation, and on his portraying well the persons and places involved in the narrative.

Skill in using language is also recognized as an important feature of good storytelling. Some storytellers, such as the Ervin sisters, Mildred Dargan and Lou Penn^oHoward, were known for their wit and skill in using word play. Others, such as Hugh^h and Vannie Ervin and Jolly and Bill Howard, are better known for their vivid imagery and telling descriptions.

A "good storyteller" is one who is reasonably accurate. His story must be believable. Vannie Ervin is considered one of the best storytellers, but he is often teased about exaggerating. When one relative remarked that Vannie told good stories, another replied, "Yes, but only half of them are true." Another said, "Well, Evander can tell the biggest stories that anybody ever told in the world."

Characteristic of Vannie's storytelling style is the emphasis he places on the qualities of things. Adjectives are usually superlative, and he draws them out slowly with a quiver in his voice. Like many family storytellers, he tries to present his material in a realistic manner, stressing the accuracy of his memory with phrases such as, "I can see it right now" and "I remember real well the time...." He presents his material as true, but many family members allege that he does not mind changing details to make a good story even better. Vannie's excellent memory for details is admired, however, and his recognition as a good storyteller shows that some exaggeration is seen as enhancing a

story.

Vannie took his storytelling style, and some of his stories, from his father, Hugh, who was also considered an expert narrator. Hugh, too, was teased about exaggerating. His use of exaggeration, however, was more deliberate, and several of his stories could be considered tall tales. Like other traditional tall tale tellers, he took painstaking care in giving details to make his story believable; then concluded with an unbelievable ending. The following story, recorded when Hugh was 92, is typical of his style:

Back some eighty years ago when I was a small lad of some ten years, we used to have community candy pullings down at the schoolhouse. It was a small one-room schoolhouse. We'd place a big iron pot and put about three or four quarts of molasses in it and boil it a certain length of time until it got to the consistency that it would pull. Well, of course, the custom was that a girl and a boy would get a piece and pull until it got to the right stage and then the girl would put one end of it in her mouth and the boy the other and they'd commence to chew. And, uh, when they got their mouths together, why he was entitled to kiss her. But I was too bashful; I always bit mine off just before I got to the girl.

But, anyhow, my brother Robert was about five years older, and he was very much in love with Mary McCall, a very pretty girl in the community. I was very much in love with her myself. All the boys were, in fact. And he had engagements with our only horse and buggy to go and get Mary, who lived down the road about a mile. So the rest of us had to walk. Well, the old, the old mare, old horse, mare was very restless when she got away from home. Sometimes you had to hold her while a person was getting in the buggy. So Robert got in the buggy, put Mary in, and, uh, then he turned her loose, and the horse made a dash and hit a tree. And Mary had a hand dish full of pulled candy in her lap. When it hit the tree that threw her forward, and the candy went out on the ground and broke into about a thousand pieces. So Robert had to walk home with Mary.

Well, of course, my father and mother and all my sisters were there. My father insisted on bringing the buggy home, and I said, "Pa, why not just leave it here?" "No, I've got to carry it home tonight, because I've got to do my calls tomorrow." So the crossbar, which holds the two shafts together, was broken out. That left the buggy with the shafts with no control. The wheels would turn one way and the other. Father sent a boy to call me, "Get him to get the shafts and you guide," and Mother carried the

lantern, and my father and all the girls pushed. And the road, which was still about a mile, was pretty sandy. And I couldn't hold the buggy in the track. And my father was cross and I was about to cry. "Oh, hold the buggy in the road, boy." "Pa, I can't hold the buggy. It's just running out the road and I can't do nothing." Well, that went on all the way home. Finally got home. And the next morning I went out there and I trailed my, where I had cried all the way from the schoolhouse. I could see my tear drops all the way from the schoolhouse to home. [laughter] (T21)

Although family members emphasize the importance of accuracy in storytelling, some exaggeration is accepted and recognized as a skill. That Hugh and Vannie Ervin are considered two of the best storytellers in spite of their exaggerations is evidence of this. Jolly and Bill Howard, both considered expert storytellers, are also said to exaggerate. Bill even calls his stories "lies." One family member indicated that this was one of the qualities which made them good storytellers, "They can dress up stories and make them real interesting."

Several family members agreed that Benton Dargan was the best teller of anecdotes in the family. Ervin Dargan mentioned his father's accuracy and memory for details as important features of his storytelling, and Lucas Dargan said that he had more confidence in the details of Benton's stories than in those of some of the other family storytellers. Frank Williamson pointed out what was essential to Benton's storytelling when he described his ability "to sift out what people wouldn't be interested in and make his story interesting and entertaining."

A storyteller known for his ability to select interesting material from his own experiences was Gus Ervin. His great-nephew, Richard Howard, described the usual subjects of Gus's narratives:

Uncle Gus had surveyed all of Florence County, uh, and

even surrounding counties. He'd done a lot of surveying. And, uh, he could just tell you tales about people, families and squabbles that had gone on through surveying and, uh, and that were just unbelievable. And he knew every one. (T18)

No doubt Gus Ervin's travels through the counties in the area as a surveyor gave him a wide range of experiences and people from which to draw the material for his anecdotes, and this, too, must have contributed to his recognition as a good storyteller.

The ability to characterize people and places well is another important criterion for good storytelling in the family. Imitation, as I mentioned earlier, is admired, but special praise is also given to those who, with limited use of imitation, can characterize people and places with special insight and verbal skill. Such ability gets high praise within the family.

Frank Williamson is considered an expert in this area. His storytelling style is reserved, and he used very few dramatic devices. Although he is generally not called on to perform as the Ervins and the Howard brothers, he is recognized as having a great store of material and a sharp wit, which he uses in appropriate situations. Tim Dargan said of him, "Frank has a story for every occasion. And I've never heard him tell one twice."

Ownership

Recognition of ownership in storytelling has interested both anthropologists and folklorists.¹¹ Unlike most of the cultures studied by these scholars, where tales are considered the exclusive property of particular narrators, ownership in the family studied here is primarily

a recognition that some persons perform particular items of verbal art better than others. Usually it is a recognition of expertise; some performers may develop the telling of a particular item into a fine art so that no one else would want to attempt it. It is also based on the assumption that a personal experience is told best in the first person.

These stories may be told second or third-hand, but listeners are often asked to imagine how the original performers told them. Stories "owned" by persons no longer living are told more freely and are introduced with statements such as, "This is one of Uncle Joe's stories." Stories recognized as belonging to persons still living are usually told reluctantly and, in the case of long narratives, with only a skeleton of the original story given. After some persuasion, Vannie Ervin told a story which he considered the specialty of Annie Louise Howard:

Vannie: I think the one about the hog, about Jolly [Howard] catching the fellow on the island with the hogs is the funniest.

AD: I haven't heard that.

Vannie: Well, now you'll have to get Annie Louise [Howard] to tell you that one.

AD: Well, you tell it, and then I'll see if I can get her to tell it. Do you remember it?

Vannie: I remember some of it. But Annie Louise tells it just, just -- But, anyhow, Jolly caught these two poachers on

¹¹ See Linda Degh's article for references, "Some Questions on the Social Function of Storytelling," *Acta Ethnographica*, 7 (1957), 135.

the island killing hogs during high water. And, of course, Jolly's just been fearless when it comes to a poacher. He'll just take a chance on getting shot. But, anyhow, he approached these two poachers and made them drop their rifles in the water and go and pick up the hogs that they'd shot. The hogs weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds a piece. And he made them tote those two hogs two miles to the ferry. The water was too high to get across. And then he carried them home. And he went in to use the telephone. And the telephone was out of order, so he went over to your Uncle Ned's. Didn't tell Annie Louise that he was leaving. Left Annie Louise in the living room with these two criminals. And he slipped out the back door.

And while he was gone -- she didn't know why they were there -- well, she decided she should entertain them. So, she, uh, went and got some fruit cake and tea and said, "Would you like some hog head cheese?" And they said, "That's the last damn thing that we ever want to see again is a hog." [laughs] But get Annie Louise to tell you that. There she was left, didn't know Jolly had gone. But Jolly went on and got the sheriff and came out and took out warrants for them. And there Annie Louise was entertaining them with fruit cake and hog head cheese. But get Annie Louise to tell you that. That's one of best stories, finest stories at all. (T11)

Role Playing

One of the well-recognized features of storytelling is role playing on the part of the storyteller. Some of the best descriptions of role playing have come not from scholars of the folk narrative, however, but from writers whose main concern is literary, such as Paulette Jiles, who describes storytelling in her own family:

Everyone had their own particular versions of these stories, and, if they had been there, commenced to re-tell it as it suited them. The important thing was where the storyteller put himself. Uncle John was dry as paper, the wise bystander who could see what was going on but too polite to comment. He had an eye for detail, for exact measurements like miles and poundage, marking off the length of a thing on his forearm or indicating its height by comparing it to the pear tree by the pond. My grandad always told stories about animals, with the exasperation of a man who could never get dogs and mules and plowhorses and setting hens to see the light

of reason. Uncle LeRoy was a confused participant, the idiotic sense of a situation never revealed to him until the last moment.¹²

Often the role a storyteller chooses to play in his own stories reflects his actual self-image, but family storytellers may present images of themselves which contradict their self-images or the images others have of them. Some family storytellers, such as Benton Dargan, assume the role of an observer in their stories. Benton was seldom a part of the action in his narratives, but stood apart and commented on the event instead. His wife once compared him to a newspaper, a commentary, perhaps, on his style of narration as well as his wealth of information.

In stories where the narrator plays a leading role, his self-image becomes more apparent. Hugh Ervin portrayed himself as a naive, shy country boy, devilish and somewhat foolish at times. His narratives were set in his childhood, during the period after the War Between the States, and he stressed the hard conditions of the times as well as the ways the family enjoyed life in spite of their poverty:

I was six years old when my brother Robert got a job with Mr. Frank Rogers. He was getting about ten, I reckon, twelve dollars a month and his board. So he said he was going to give me a dollar and a half to buy some shoes. My father used to go to town every Saturday afternoon. I'd give him the dollar and a half, come back about dark, and I'd go out there and help him take out the horse. I'd say, "Pa, did you get my shoes?" "No, son, I forgot them. I'll get them next Saturday."

Well, that went on for about three or four Saturdays. Finally one Saturday he came back, and he had my shoes. And they were brogans. They were made in one piece. They just came up over your

¹² Paulette Jiles, "Card Players and Story Tellers," This Magazine is About Schools, 5 (1971), 87.

ankle. Pretty stiff, rough leather, rough leather, and a dollar and a half. And I was proud of them. But I was a little bit disappointed; I wanted something kind of shiny looking. And there were some women killing some hogs. And they'd dug a hole to put the refuse in, two or three feet deep. And I put them on and ran out to show them to those Negro women, and I stepped in that hole with both feet.

Well, my mother called, said, "Supper's ready." She had a fire going in the other room, a big fire. And I pulled off my shoes and put them right between the andirons and went on into supper. Didn't enjoy my supper very much. Ate a little bit, went back in there, and my shoes were just as stiff as a ramrod. I got some — They used to make oil out of the knee joints of beef, called Neatsfoot Oil. And I got a bottle of that, got my shoes, commenced to rub them. And they were just like when you cook a ham. You know, the skin gets right crisp and you can break it up. I kept rubbing them and every time a piece would break off. I rubbed them and rubbed them until finally there was nothing left but the soles.

Well, that was, that was — I never had worn any shoes. I could skate pretty good on the ice, though, my feet were so tough on the bottom. We used to have ice on all the ponds, freeze every winter. So when I got fourteen years old I got a job at Mr. Mr. Rogers. I got my board and ten dollars a month. So I bought me a pair of shoes, regular lace up Sunday shoes. Fourteen years old. I was five feet nearly eleven inches, weighed one hundred and fifty pounds. Now my legs shrunk up; I'm just five feet eight inches now. But I get along very well. [laughter] (T21)

Willie Ervin, one of the best-natured members of the family, is short-tempered in his own stories, particularly when he describes losing a ball game or trying to work with animals:

Willie: Well, anyway, they gave me old Pete. And Pete was, Pete was a real character. And his idea was to go as fast as he could if he thought he could get through or either if he didn't think he was go' get through, slow up. But, anyway, he drug me all over the field. And I used to, [laughs] I used to use right bad language, and I'd scream and cry and fuss. So I found that driving a mule wasn't very good. But then after that I always got Daisy.

AD: Who was Daisy?

Willie: Daisy was an old grey mare. And she was mean, and she despised me, and I despised her. And we were always assigned

to one another. And so that's my farm work, was screaming and cussing at Daisy. And, uh, one day she got me. I, I had a little difficulty getting on her because I'd ride her to the field, and every time I'd try to jump on her she'd move out the way. And so I'd gotten on her that day, and I was, so I decided I better not get off her to open the gate. So I leaned off to open the gate while I was on her. And, uh, she took advantage and drug me all over the place and skinned me all up. So I ran in the house and got the gun, shot her.

AD: You shot her?

Willie: Uh huh. But I didn't kill her. Just shot her. See, I think I shot this horse we had too. She got in the pea field one time, the corn field. I was out planting peas. And, so I wasn't much for farming with mules. (T12)

Billy Howard, in his personal narratives, uses cunning and quick thinking to get out of difficult situations on hunting and fishing trips. In Sarah Dargan's stories, she is clumsy in urban or sophisticated settings. These roles played by family storytellers in their own stories should be seen not as exact reflections of the storyteller's self-image but partly as images they enjoy presenting to their audiences. No one is likely to make himself look like a fool if he really thinks of himself as a fool. This willingness of family storytellers to mock themselves has strong parallels to the family's portrayal of themselves as a group to outsiders, which will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

Performer and Audience Interaction

In order to understand fully the creative process involved in verbal art, the role of the audience as well as that of the narrator must be considered. Although folktale scholars have given this some attention,¹³ there are differences between the kinds of audience

responses to folktales, which are not meant to be believed, and the responses to verbal art which is told as true. The latter, therefore, deserve special attention.

To observe the normal interaction between audience and performer, the performance should be observed in its natural context. Although most of the examples used here are from recordings which were made with only one other person present besides the main informant and myself, the kinds of interaction which they illustrate are similar to those I observed in a more natural context.

Laughter is one of the most powerful means the audience has of shaping a performance. Laughter encourages the performer to develop a part of the story which the audience finds humorous or to repeat a phrase which caused the laughter. Members of the audience will also repeat a phrase while they are laughing, and sometimes a phrase is repeated several times by audience and teller amidst the laughter of the group.

The audience's failure to laugh when expected also affects the performance. When this happens, the narrator often continues the story by adding another ending which the audience might find more humorous or an ending which is less dependent on laughter for a response. This is probably what Hugh Ervin did in the example given earlier (p.146) where he describes his experience with his first pair of shoes. When Hugh got no response to his description of how he rubbed the shoes

¹³ See, for example, Linda Degh, Folktales and Society, trans. Emily M. Schossberger (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 87-89.

until there was nothing left but the soles, he went on to describe how he could skate on ice barefoot and concluded by telling how he had "shrunk" in his old age.

Interruptions to ask about details or for more information are common in storytelling. Often these questions are to determine where the characters in the story lived and what their relationship is to members of the audience. Lucas Dargan made this sort of interruption when Vannie Ervin began a description of a relative whom Lucas did not know:

Vannie: This was back before the War Between the States. It was Brockington, Aunt Brockington.

Lucas: Now who was she?

Vannie: She wasn't an ancestor. She was a great-great-great aunt.

Lucas: Yes, of course, you know, Gran-Gran's name was Mary Brockington Hart. I didn't know that until fairly recently.

Vannie: Uh huh, yes. Well, anyhow, the Brockingtons lived where the Clarks live now. That was Brockington land. And she was so fat that she always had two little slave girls when she went to walk to push her. They would get behind her and push her and help her walk. They say the sleeves to her dress were so big, when her dress would wear out, she would cut off her sleeves and make dresses for the children. [laughter]

Lucas: [laughs] That's a folktale.

Vannie: Yes. [laughs] They say that was true. (T9)

The final interruption from Lucas was a response to assumed exaggeration, which I will discuss later. The first responses are the ones which illustrate the point made here.

Members of the audience frequently interrupt to add details and to correct the narrator if they participated in the event being described

themselves, or if they heard the story differently. Those who shared the experience with the narrator feel free to offer their corrections, since the narrator does not "own" the experience even if he or she is considered the best one to tell it. Occasionally, narrators are corrected if they vary from their own previous versions of a story which the audience likes better. I do not have an effective example of this on tape, but a description by Paulette Jiles illustrates well this kind of interruption:

Those people developed storytelling and talking to a fine art; the way the narration will be interrupted by someone who claims to have been there, and knew the 'yellow, and it was Tishia Racy's dog, not Charlies'; and then a storm of objections and counter-objections until this knot is untangled, the flow begins again, the rise and fall of voices.¹⁴

Exaggeration is checked by members of the audience expressing disbelief in something said by the narrator. This militates against exaggeration or tall-tale telling as an esthetic and toward accuracy and acceptable realism. One example of this type of response was given on p. 150; another is the following exchange:

Ervin Dargan: He [McIver Williamson] was so, he'd get so aggravated when he couldn't find pliers, he used to buy pliers from Sears Roebuck by the bushel. They cost about ten cents a piece, and he'd just have them scattered all around the place, and any time he wanted pliers he'd have them.

Lucas Dargan: [laughs] I suspect he bought them by the dozen instead of by the bushel.

Ervin: I heard it was by the bushel. [laughter] (T1)

Frequent interjections by the audience are made to emphasize a point being made in the narration. Usually these elicit no comment from the storyteller and do not stop the flow of narration, as in the following

¹⁴ Jiles, 87.

example. The first remark from the audience was a correction; the last two were made to emphasize the isolation and unsophistication of the family in their pride at having the first appendicitis operation in the area, which the listeners obviously see as the main point of humor in the story:

Hugh Ervin: I was about twelve or fourteen years old, and Robert was four or five years older, and he had appendicitis. Dr. McLeod had just established his hospital here. So he went out there. He said that he had never operated for that trouble, and he reckoned he better take him to a famous doctor in Richmond, Dr. Wilson. So they decided on that, and Dr. McLeod and Cousin Bright [Williamson] and Robert went on to Greenville. I don't remember whether it was Cousin Bright or Cousin McIver [Williamson], one of them.

Margaret Ervin: Went on to Richmond.

Hugh: It must have been Cousin McIver 'cause Robert had worked for him and knew him. Well, they came back after three or four days and said, "Robert," said, "the doctor said Robert will have to be there for at least a month. And when he got out he shouldn't take any more exercise than walking." Well, we were very proud of the fact that Robert was the first appendicitis case around here. We just thought it was something to be proud of.

Frank Williamson: Yes sir!

Margaret: A celebration!

Hugh: Of course a lot of discussion. So, I went out one morning, and a friend had given me a alarming watch about that big around. I wound it up and stuck it in my pocket and got about half done working and that watch went off. And I didn't know it had an alarm on it. [laughs] "Br-r-r-r." I left the job, got up, and I walked over to the house -- about fifty or a hundred feet -- holding my side and walking just like this. [laughter] Doubled up. And Mother was standing there, and she said, "Hugh, what's the matter?" I said, "My appendix bust." [laughter] "My appendicitis has bust." [laughter] And she said, "Come on in here." So I held my side and got to straightening up so I could walk up the steps. Kept straightening up, the thing was still buzzing, got up on the piazza and stood up. I said, "That's the quickest cure, quickest cure for appendix you'd ever have." [laughter] (T14)

Often there is little distinction between narrator and audience,

although one person will tend to control the floor. In these performances the narrative becomes a collective product of some or all who are present. This is particularly true when a group of family members are reminiscing about an experience they all shared. One person begins the narration, but soon it is picked up by another who was also there and has something to add, and before the story has been completed several persons have taken up the narrative line and contributed what they remember.

Usually family storytellers are patient with interruptions and remarks from the audience and are appreciative of added details. They expect questions and feel that most interruptions add information which contributes to the story's effect. When I interviewed Vannie Ervin, for example, he asked me to bring my father to help him remember dates and genealogical information for the stories he planned to tell. Sometimes, however, these interruptions break the train of thought or bring in unnecessary information which frustrates the good storyteller. Establishing the genealogy and location of characters in a short anecdote can be particularly distracting and can destroy the story's effect:

Vannie Ervin: I remember the Tobiasases who lived on the Street right there. Had a pretty good size house. And, uh, the first house on the Street going down there.

Margaret Eryin: Where?

Vannie: Near where [inaudible] Now, and the Tobiasases lived there. I just can remember them. They left and went over to live on the Coggeshall Place. Near Johnny James's. Lived right there where the old gin house used to be. On the Coggeshall Place. Well, you went across Back Swamp. And went up the hill to where the gin house was.

Lucas Dargan: Yeah, I know where that is.

Vannie: To the right. The big old gin house. The Tobiasases lived there. And the old man Tobias built the barns there, the

father. He was living on the Coggeshall Place and father of the crowd. But anyhow the Tobiases were pretty rowdy people. And old Uncle Melvin Boston, uh --

Margaret: Where did the Boston's live?

Vannie: The Bostons lived on down the Street. There were a lot of Bostons.

Lucas: Now the Bostons had been there a good while, hadn't they?

Vannie: Yeah, Uncle Benton got them from Georgetown.

Lucas: Oh, is that right?

Vannie: Yeah, in the sawmill. They had them in Effingham first, or Grandfather Dargan had them. But, anyhow, that's where Bull Boston came from, Effingham. But, anyhow, the Tobiases were pretty rowdy, and they'd get drunk on Saturday nights. And Melvin and Mac lived on down the Street, and one night the Tobiases got drunk and raising hell down the Street. And Aunt Mac was telling Mother or Father about it. Said, "Great God, we hear them both coming." Said, "And cussing and shouting and hollering and shooting." Said, "Melvin hear them and land the quilt in the joists."

Lucas: Land the what?

Vannie: Land the quilt. Got out of bed so fast he kicked the quilt up where it hung around the joists. [Lucas: laughs] And I thought that was a real good expression, "Land the quilt in the joists." [laughs] But that's some kicking, to kick the quilt in the joists. (T9)

In this example, the reader can see that the question, "Where did the Bostons live?" effectively diverted the storyteller, and the question, "Land the what?" somewhat destroyed its humorous effect.

There are good and bad audiences just as there are good and bad storytellers. Rick McIver, after he was interrupted by his wife Mary Hart, gave examples of what he considered a bad listener. He playfully accused his wife and her brother of ruining stories by asking irrelevant questions, adding that his son, Ricky, had inherited the tendency from his mother. To illustrate, he described the time he tried to tell a story about the theft

and recovery of a friend's car. He had begun the story by saying, "Mary Burroughs bought a new car yesterday, and last night she parked it outside the theater. When she got out of the movie the car was gone," when his son, Ricky, interrupted to ask, "Daddy, what was on at the movie?" The bad audience, then, is one which interrupts with questions which are either distracting or irrelevant. The good audience responds to the narration in a way which enhances the intended effect.

Social Use

To determine the various uses of verbal art within the family, it is necessary to study the specific contexts in which particular items are performed. The way a performer uses an item in a situation has a strong impact on the form, content, manner of delivery, and nature of response from the audience. The same item may be told for one reason in one situation and for a different reason in another; it also may have more than one use in a particular situation.

Most verbal art in the family is used primarily for entertainment, and thus it requires that the narrator know how to appeal to his audience's sense of humor. There are other social uses of verbal art in the family, which though they may be secondary are nevertheless significant. One use is to illustrate points made in conversation. A story may be used to verify or validate a statement made in conversation. "Quotes" are often used this way. For example, in a recent conversation between Bill Howard and Lucas Dargan, Bill described how his son, Billy, was trying to build up some poor land and suggested that the old belief that some land cannot be improved is false. Lucas agreed and quoted Mr. McIver Williamson,

- who advocated improving poor land with the warning, "Poor land ain't good for growing nothing but poor people."

Verbal art is also used for didactic purposes. Keith Williamson told of a conversation he had with a man who had worked for his grandfather, Benton Dargan. Keith and the man were skinning a deer and discussing knives when the man said, "You know your grandfather used to say, 'Never buy a dull knife, because if the man who made it couldn't sharpen it, then you can't either.'" Relating incidents of family history to younger members of the family to teach them about their past is an important didactic use of verbal art. Stories which begin with genealogical data also have the secondary purpose of teaching children family history.

Narratives to explain the origin or meaning of things are common. Explanations for the origins of place names, nicknames, and private expressions form a large part of this category. During an interview with Ned Dargan I asked for some of the names of fields in the area. Ned explained how the name, Deaded New Ground Field, was given:

Well, Deaded New Ground was on the island. And, uh, the procedure in early days clearing land in the river swamp was you'd, you deaded the trees. You girdled the trees to kill them. And this was in slavery times. And, uh, it wasn't a real quick process. It took several years before you cleared up a field. But the first step was to girdle all the trees and kill them. And the reason they killed them, the cypress trees, because they'd float if they were dried out. And they floated them to Georgetown for ship masts, ship building material. So they deaded them several years ahead of clearing the land, so they'd be dry and would float. A cypress log, if you cut it green, it would sink. But if it dried out standing up it would float down the river to Georgetown. And, uh, there was one large area there that had dykes around it and killed all the trees in preparation for clearing it. But they never did get it cleared, and the War Between the States came along, and the trees just kept standing there for years. And they called it-- new ground was land that had just

been cleared -- so it's the Deaded New Ground Field. Part of it never did get cleared up, and there were dead trees standing. Part of it was cleared, and part of it, the trees were just deaded. So it was the Deaded New Ground Field. (T6)

While the esoteric lore of the family functions positively to strengthen family identity, at the same time, it may have the negative effect of making outsiders feel excluded. A clear example of this was the codes which the five Ervin sisters invented for talking privately among themselves when their boy friends came to visit. For several weeks colors would have special meaning which only the sisters understood; the next week they would use numbers or hand gestures. This was a way of teasing the boys, of course, and was not a common use of esoteric expressions in the family.

Usually family members avoid using highly esoteric references when outside guests are present, selecting, instead, material which outsiders could understand and appreciate. Any use of verbal art which draws on the shared knowledge and experiences of family members will tend to exclude outsiders, however, even though family members may try to draw them into the situation with explanations of the language and meaning of the narration.

Verbal art is frequently used for teasing family members. This is often done by telling an embarrassing experience of a member of the audience or using nicknames based on an embarrassing incident, trait, or distinctive feature. During the Family Games one summer a family member from a nearby town, who had gained weight since the last family gathering he had attended, was nicknamed "Minnesota," a reference to the overweight pool player, "Minnesota Fats." Mildred Ervin Dargan nicknamed her grandson Sam, "Sammy Claus," when he came home for Christmas with a

long beard. Suter Ervin's nickname, "General," used to tease her for giving orders to her sisters and cousins, is another example.

Private words and phrases can also be used for teasing. During a vacation a family member wrote home describing his feelings about his trip in rather emotional, flowery language. The expression, "I was in full ecstasy," taken from the letter, was used as an overstatement of feelings for several months afterwards to tease him.

Teasing is more manipulative than other uses of verbal art. Usually, its purpose is to demonstrate, with humor, slight disapproval and to get the point across without offending the person toward whom the remark is directed. Often, however, it is simply a display of affection.

These are the major uses of verbal art in the family. Other social uses, such as admonition, probably exist, but I did not observe this in my fieldwork.

This chapter has explored some of the interrelationships between expressive forms, performance styles, esthetic responses, and social uses of verbal art in the family setting. It has shown how experiences can be translated into different expressive forms and can have different uses in particular situations. The family's esthetic generally recognizes expertise in those with skill in using language and gestures, in characterizing people and places well, and in selecting material from their own experiences to use in appropriate situations. It is an esthetic which values accuracy and realism, but at the same time appreciates the ability to play with the borders of realism and fantasy artistically. In the following chapter I will show how this esthetic is expressed in the preference for certain topics and certain images of the family group.

CHAPTER VI

VERBAL ART: TOPICS AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

A topical analysis of family storytelling can reveal important relationships between the family's collective identity and its expression in verbal art. This chapter does not include all the areas of emphasis in content; I have selected those which seem to reflect best the family's preference for certain topics and the ways they portray themselves in their verbal art.

Ancestors and Historic Events

Important events in the lives of past generations of the family are favorite topics of storytelling. Family migrations to the area, such as the narrative of the Ervin family's trip by boat from Belfast to the Carolina colony, and descriptions of the way of life of these early ancestors are among the subjects frequently discussed. Some of these narratives give a colorful picture of family ancestors, such as the story of how an Ervin relative was captured in Boston by the pirate, Blackbeard, and brought to Charleston, South Carolina, where he jumped ship and escaped. Other narratives stress the humble beginnings of pioneer ancestors who came to the area with few possessions and little education, and who, by "pulling themselves up by the boot straps," acquired property, education, and a higher standard of living.

Many narratives also reflect pride in the accomplishments of ancestors

who made their mark in history or in the progress of the community. Other ancestors, although they did not make such contributions, are sometimes even more memorable because of their personalities or eccentric behavior. These, however, I am reserving for a separate chapter.

Stories about historic events which one might assume would appear in the family's repertoire seem to be rare. Narratives of Civil War experiences, for example, which are said to be common in the repertoires of Northern and particularly Southern families,¹ are seldom told by this family even though many took an active part in the war. Lucas Dargan said that although the war and its aftermath were common topics in his childhood and he even knew a few persons who had lived through the war, most of the descriptions he heard were of a general nature. He could not recall hearing actual experiences of the war or memorable stories associated with it. I collected only one Civil War story in my fieldwork with the family. It was told by Roseanne Howard Coggeshall, who had heard it from her mother, Lou Penn Ervin Howard:

That was mother's grandmother. Harriet McIver, I believe was her name. I think she married an Ervin. I think that's right. I know mother's mother was a McIver. But anyhow the Union soldiers were over there [Florence prison camp] and they didn't have anything to eat. And she just felt so sorry for them. So she carried some clabber² and some greens to them. That was about all they had then. But the clabber had some germ in it. They say she killed more Union soldiers than the soldiers did. But they always laughed about that. Of course she did it out of the goodness of her heart. She loaded up the wagon and took the food over there. But it just had that germ in it and so many got sick and died. (FN3)

¹ Steve Zeitlin et al., eds., "I'd Like to Think They Were Pirates" (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1975), p. 10.

² curdled milk.

Rites of Passage

Rites of passage: births, reaching maturity, leaving home for the first time, marriages, and deaths are the topics of many family narratives. Hugh and Ida Ervin's wedding trip by canoe down the Pee Dee River is a favorite story of their children and grandchildren. A story told by Richard Howard describes his first drink with his father. On his first hunt with the adult men on Thanksgiving he proved himself to be an adult by doing something which required skill and, perhaps, saving his father's life. The event obviously marked an important transition in his life:

And then another thing funny happened on that hunt. I never had had a drink with my father. And, uh, that Thanksgiving morning he and I had gone -- the fields weren't planted then and they were all in broomstraw -- and, uh, we were walking the fields, he and I, trying to jump deer. And we got down the lower part of the fields down next to the Flag Marsh and Daddy had gotten tired and he was standing up on the dam. And I was walking along and this little buck jumped up and I shot him and saw that I had wounded him. And he made a complete u-turn and came back heading towards my father. And it was a long shot, but I decided I'd shoot him one more time. So, I did and I killed him. And so I went over there. We never did believe in drinking on the island while you were hunting, but if you decided that you'd quit for the day, then you might have a drink. And, uh, my father always carried in his hunting coat a little half pint of Jack Daniels,³ for medical purposes, he said. And, uh, he said, "Well, you've been down at the Citadel for three months now." Said, "I know you can take a drink straight if it's the same way it was when I was down there." So he and I had our first drink together that day. (T18)

Repartee

The ability to engage in repartee, particularly with puns, retorts, word-play, and aphorisms, is admired, and many such remarks have been

³ "Jack Daniels" is a sour-mash bourbon whisky, highly esteemed by connoisseurs.

preserved in family anecdotes. Certain family members are recognized as experts in repartee. McIver Williamson was known for his ability to come back with quick retorts and to make clever remarks. Frank Williamson recalled some of his uncle's retorts. On one occasion McIver's friend, Earl, was bragging about how he planned to stop a corrupt political candidate from getting elected by hiring a lawyer, whose ethics were also questionable, to help him. McIver's response was, "If I was go' raise chickens, I wouldn't start out setting my hens on a rotten egg."

Frank also described the time his uncle got the final word with him as they were driving through the woods:

He liked to drive his car fast, and I guess he'd been through there before, but he went through two trees, and there was just barely enough room to make it. He did that a lot to scare people. I thought I'd make a smart remark and said, "Uncle McIver, if you had waited much longer, you wouldn't have been able to get through those trees." He said, "That's why I was going so fast." (FN2)

Mildred Ervin Dargan was also known for her ability to make puns and come back with quick retorts. Her remark to McIver Williamson when he suggested that his father-in-law could take lessons from her in how to get his daughters married has been preserved in a family anecdote:

Lucas Dargan: Manda, I think I told you about his saying when, uh, Sarah and Happy [Dargan] got married, uh, Mr. McIver Williamson said that Mildred [their mother] ought to start a school of matrimony and he would pay Cousin Sam's [Ervin] tuition. Cousin Sam was his father-in-law and see he [McIver Williamson] married Cousin Hal [Harriet Ervin Williamson]. And none of the other daughters got married. He said he would pay Cousin Sam's tuition. [laughter] And Aunt Mildred was never at a loss for a reply, and she said the trouble was Cousin Sam was so discouraged with the first one [Hal's marriage to McIver] he [laughter] didn't want to risk any more. (T1)

Part of the humor of this anecdote, which depends largely on knowing the persons involved, is that Mr. McIver Williamson did not get the final word.

Family Relationships

Family relationships are central to many family stories and "descriptions." Relationships between members of the family community are emphasized in reminiscences of family gatherings and other activities which brought the family together. They picture the family as clannish and gregarious, with little or no conflict between family members.

Many family stories, however, describe relationships that are considered unusual: the feuding brother and sister, the meek husband and domineering wife, the couple who address each other formally as Mr. or Mrs. Underlying these stories are assumptions about the normal or ideal relationships between family members. Bill Howard, for example, told of how Mr. Rick McIver used to get up early, go to his sister's house, build a fire, put on the water for hominy, then wake his sister up, and they would have breakfast together. One day after he had returned from his morning visit, Mr. Rick sighed and shook his head. Bill asked what was wrong, and Mr. Rick replied, "I don't understand my sister. I do my part and speak to her on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, but she won't do her part and speak to me on Tuesday and Thursday." (FNI)

Recollections of the Past

For each generation, it is mainly the recollections of family pastimes that are used to portray their period of growing up as "the good old days."

Stories and descriptions of family pastimes focus on the strength of family ties and the family's ability to enjoy life. Older generations will often argue that things were better when they were growing up, but, at the same time, they emphasize that these were hard times. Descriptions of how they walked several miles to school in the snow, often "with no shoes," holding a freshly boiled egg in each pocket to keep their hands warm, and of working all day in the fields for a 10-cent wage or twelve hours in a store for \$1.00 are told to impress on younger generations that they have things much easier than their parents and grandparents. When these older generations grew up, winters were colder, there was more snow, and the ponds froze every winter. Summers were hotter, and there were no electric fans or air conditioners to help relieve the heat. While it is definitely possible that the weather was harsher and no doubt that economic conditions were worse, it is clear that every generation tends to look back to the days of the past when "things were better" even when they were worse.

Pastimes

Every generation and every group of cousin-friends has favorite stories associated with family pastimes. For the women who grew up in the 1920s and 30s, it is stories about their camping trips on Black Creek, their trips to the mountains every summer, and the plays and games they played when they were young. For the men, it is stories and descriptions of hunting and fishing trips. The women also enjoy telling stories about these trips, which they heard from their fathers and brothers. Almost everyone in the family knows the story about George Williamson's

encounter with a wild cat on Witherspoon Island:

Vannie Ervin: One time I remember over there, this same hunt, well, Tom Williamson, I mean George Williamson, young Tom's father, had been out. They were all out turkey hunting. And George was a good turkey hunter, and he'd gotten down between two logs and had some turkeys scattered. He was calling the turkeys. He kept yapping, and the turkey kept answering. And he was all excited looking towards the turkey. And this big wild cat got on one of those logs, of course, hearing the noise and mistook George for the turkey. And jumped on him and just scratched him up and liked to scared him to death. He came into camp after night all scratched, his face bleeding, and just as white as a sheet. (T11)

A favorite hunting story of my generation was told by Richard Howard:

I think one of the funniest stories in my age group is, uh, one night we were coon hunting: Charles Howard, Ben Williamson, and myself. And we were along side the lake, up to where there's Bröckton Swamp. And we had a real good coon dog of Charles's named Rex. Rex treed up this big old gum tree, had a lot of bullis vines going up it. So, Charles got on one side the tree and I got on the other and we told Ben to get under the tree and pull the vine. Wanted to pull the vine to make the coon look down. If he looked down his eyes would shine in the light and then you could shoot him. And, uh, Ben was just pulling the vine and we were hollering at him to, "Jerk the vine, Ben." And Ben was looking up in the air jerking the vine. Then we heard Ben over there gagging and coughing and vomiting and carrying on. And we shined the light down there on Ben, and he was on all fours just real sick, just bad sick. And said, "Ben, what's wrong with you?" And, uh, he'd vomit, and, oh, just terrible. Finally he looked up, and he said, "That damn coon." And we knew what had happened then. He was looking straight up and that coon had hit him dead eye. [laughter] (T18)

Eating Feats

Special foods and meals are the focus of a large number of family pastimes, and in the family's verbal art references to eating are common. The men, in particular, take great pride in being able to eat things which

are not common fare and which anyone with a weak stomach could not easily handle. Stories about eating feats emphasize the strong constitutions and general ruggedness of rural people. As an indication of his pride in his country cousins' rugged image, Lucas Dargan said that when he was young he would "tell people around town proudly" that his cousin, Hugh Dargan, could eat tobacco worms. His brother, Ned Dargan, recalled the specific time when Hugh ate a worm:

One of our jobs in those days was picking tobacco worms. We didn't have these high powered insecticides back then. And used to pick tobacco worms off the tobacco stalks. And had a lot of people. Sometimes would be fifteen or twenty. Each person would take a row and pick off the tobacco worms and you put the worms in -- you had a can or a bucket you put the tobacco worms in. And, uh, Hugh Dargan didn't care about work too much. And we did a lot playing along with our work. But, anyhow, we'd get to the end of the row and we'd all talk and would all have this can of tobacco worms. So, one day we told Hugh, said, uh, "Give you" -- I forgot how much it was, whether it was a nickel or a dime -- "to eat a tobacco worm." And so Hugh said, "Well, I'll eat one." He said, "I can make a half a day's work eating a tobacco worm." [laughs] So, he ate a tobacco worm and quit work for half a day. [laughter] (T6)

Ned also described the kinds of foods eaten on the boys' campouts when he was young:

We'd plan on camping about every weekend in the fall and in the spring. And sometimes in the summer. In the summer time we didn't go camping quite as much. The mosquitoes were so bad. But we used to camp and fish. We'd try to catch our fish and food.

And one time there were four of us, I believe, and we all had an organization. We'd put in a dime a week, I believe it was, to buy fishing tackle and camping supplies. And the name was, "Us and Company".... And, uh, weren't always very successful in catching enough fish to eat, so we just made a policy of eating most anything. Tried to live off the land. And, uh, we had one fellow that was a tenant on the Howard Place over here had children that were excellent with slingshots. And they'd go along with us, and they could kill birds and snakes with a sling shot. [laughs] We'd eat anything we killed. [laughs]

AD: Y'all ate snakes?

Ned: Yes, yes, we'd, we'd skin the snakes and cut it up and eat the snakes. And we'd eat what we used to call, uh, really a heron, but we called it a pojo³ back then. And there were always -- And, uh, marsh hens. There were a good many marsh hens over there. Marsh hens are pretty good eating. And, uh, they weren't too wild, and we'd once in a while kill a marsh hen and eat the marsh hen. [laughs] (T6)

The story of the "Bag Supper" describes another eating feat:

Ned Dargan: One of the interesting parties we had, uh, before Vannie Ervin's wedding was the bag supper. Uh, Vannie was going with his wife, Margaret Mansfield, and a good friend of mine who used to live here and lived, went to Clemson with me, Clarence Ellerbe, he was working for the Soil Conservation Service and going with Margaret. She lived in Spartanburg, and Clarence was in Spartanburg. And she came here to teach school, and they got engaged. They were engaged to be married, Clarence and Margaret. And Vannie was going with Margaret, carrying her out to dances and things. And Ervin [Dargan] saw him one night. They were having a party, and Ervin gave him a bag. Said, "Vannie, you're holding the bag. You just wasting your time." Said, "Carrying Margaret out, entertaining her all weekend and everything." Said, "She's go' marry Clarence Ellerbe."

Gullough Dargan: "And you go' get left."

Ned: "And you go' be left holding the bag." And Vannie said, "Well, I'll tell you." Said, "You give me that bag," and said, "I'll make you eat it." And Ervin said, "All right, I'll eat it if you [laughs] marry Margaret."

So, uh, sometime later, uh, Vannie and Margaret got engaged. And not long before the wedding they, Vannie sent out the word, said, "We are go' have a bag supper down on Black Creek." Said, "What's a bag supper?" Said, "Ervin's go' eat the bag he gave me about six or eight months ago." [laughter] And so we had a big party down on the creek. And the highlight of the thing, built a fire, and everybody gathered around. Uh, Vannie said, "All right, Ervin, here's the bag for you to eat." Ervin said, "All right." So he got a big frying pan and put a little grease and salt and pepper in the frying pan. [laughs] tore up the bag and put it in the frying pan and ate the bag. [laughter] (T6)

³ "The heron, the poor joe. Gullah." From Francis W. Bradley, "A Word List from South Carolina," Publications of the American Dialect Society, No. 14 (1950), 53.

Practical Jokes

Practical jokes are also the focus of many family stories and descriptions. Overnight gatherings, such as campouts and house parties, are the usual settings for well known traditional pranks such as short-sheeting and putting cellophane over the toilet bowl. These pranks, however, are not recalled with as much enjoyment as the family's own inventions, which have become traditional, in some cases, by being passed on to other generations.

Part of the entertainment at the Sisters' House Party, held each year by the Ervin and Dargan double-first cousins, is reminiscing about practical jokes of previous house parties and introducing new tricks or variations of old ones. This is an all-female party, and one tradition is to bring a mock man along. One year it was a life-size poster of Danny Kaye, which the cousins put in a group photograph and sent home to their husbands. Several years later a life-size cardboard figure from a bank advertisement was brought to the party and used to scare the cousins by putting it in unexpected places.

A few of the pranks played by the older generation at the Sisters' House Party are carried on by their daughters at their own house parties. One year at the annual gathering of the older women, for example, a relative who was not part of the group scared her cousins by dressing in old clothes, a dark wig, sunglasses, and putting pecans in her cheeks, then pretending to be a patient from the mental hospital. A few years later a member of the younger generation gave a similar performance at a house party by disguising as a "hippie" on drugs.

The unsuspecting visitor from town is frequently the target for

family pranks:

Ervin Dargan: She [Clara] was, uh, an interesting old character herself. And a good cook. She, she put up with a lot from us. But, uh, I remember the time that they, uh, invited Murray Byrd out for the weekend. And they told him to be real careful that they had a colored woman that worked at the house that had spells and was right dangerous, sometimes. And then they told Aunt Clara that a man was coming out there that carried snakes around in a suitcase. And so they, uh, let Murray come to the door by himself. He knocked on the door, and Aunt Clara met him with a big stick. [laughter] Said, "Don't you put your foot in this house or I'll bust your head wide open." And I reckon they had to catch Murray. [laughter] She was at the door watching. (T17)

Rural versus Urban

Understanding many family stories requires knowing how storytellers play on the stereotype of the country bumpkin. This is usually done by contrasting rural and town people. Many narratives depict family members appearing naive and foolish in sophisticated urban settings. A good example of this is Vannie Ervin's story of how he and his cousins were directed to a piano concert instead of to a field event as they had planned. Vannie's narration is typical of many family stories, where instead of focusing on a sequence of increasingly complicated actions, there is a widening contrast drawn between family members and "outsiders." This is accomplished not only by the narrator but also by a member of the audience, who interjects comments to emphasize the contrast:

Vannie: But, anyhow, used to have field day. And 'course every, all the little school children participated. And every kind of race you could think of and high jump and broad jump. I don't think they had pole vaulting. But, anyhow, we all went. I remember Ned and Hugh and Jody and me and Suter and Ily. And we went to Hartsville. And Father in his old 1921 Ford. It was full

of children. And Father stopped the thing in Hartsville.
[tape changed]

Well, anyhow, we all piled into the old Ford. And when Father got to Hartsville he asked this officer where the exercises were. And he directed us down to the auditorium at Coker College. And Father followed them, and we saw all the people going in all dressed up. And finally we followed the crowd in there. We just thought maybe we'd go through the door and on out to the back. And then a man just looked at us and got Father and carried him down there, and here are all these barefooted children following along. Ushered us to our seats. And sat down there just quiet. And I can remember pressing my fingers into those big old mahogany seats and seeing my fingerprints on it. Just sitting there picking my toes. [laughter]

Lucas Dargan: And your nose. [laughs]

Vannie: Nothing going on. Just sitting there. After a while this fellow came and drew a big old purple curtain back. A fellow came out there and threw his hair over his head, face, and then threw it back [imitates exaggerated bow] and bowed again. And then went over to the piano and he played up and down. [imitates dramatic playing] [laughter] And then after a while he'd stand up and throw his hair back over his face and throw it back, and then everybody would clap. [claps hands] [laughter]

Lucas: Except you.

Vannie: And six or eight of us just sitting there picking at our toes [laughter] and stretching and looking around. And the fellow would go back and [imitates sound and gestures of playing piano] [laughter] He was just going up and down. [laughter]

Lucas: Playing that music, huh.

Vannie: Then he'd stand up and chunk his hair over his face. [imitates exaggerated bow] [laughter] That thing went on, Father watching all us little fidgety children. After a while he just got up and marched out. All these people looking at us so dignified, people with little goatees. [laughter] But I never will forget that as long as I live. (T9)

The family's portrayal of themselves as unsophisticated rural people is done self-consciously; and the humor of much of their verbal art which projects this image lies in the implied shock of town people to rural behavior. This image is also played out occasionally to embarrass family

members in front of outsiders, such as meeting relatives at airports dressed in caricatured "country clothes:" poke bonnets and overalls with vegetables in the pockets. Ily Ervin Jeffers described two of the times this was done to members of her generation:

We used to meet people and do all kinds of things too. One time when Gin had the cousins up Sae couldn't come the first day. She was riding down on the bus. About a dozen of us dressed up just as tacky as we could: high heels and bobbie socks and other tacky clothes, and we were talking real tacky too. When Sae got off the bus we ran up and hugged her. Sae told us later that what made it so bad was that she had been sitting next to a nice man on the bus and had been telling him that her cousins were coming to meet her, and saying how nice they were.

One time I got done too. I was staying at Little Switzerland with all the cousins, and I had to go to New York. I was living there then. So I caught the train at Marion, North Carolina. Just before the train left my cousins and sisters got on and said, "Good-bye, Sister, don't take up with any strange men. Be careful in the big city." Then they handed me a bunch of weeds. (FN3)

The tradition of "dressing up" to greet or send off relatives was started by Ily and her generation of cousins, who grew up in the 1920s and 30s, and it has been carried on by their children. Cousins are greeted with signs reading, "Welcome Home Cousin," or "Back Swamp Welcoming Committee." Tug Dargan described his reaction to seeing his cousins in a bus station:

They [Ervin and Jeffers] used to get that whole clan out there. And I was sitting on a bus going to Kingstree or something or either getting off, and just all these weird people out there. And doggone if it ain't my relatives out there with squashes hanging out of their pockets and stuff.... It was a crew. (T5)

Another stereotyped trait of rural behavior which the family uses self-consciously is a "country accent," using forms of speech and pronunciations which, to them, sound uneducated. In regular conversation,

this is done for emphasis, such as saying, "I ain't gonna do it," for a firm but playful effect. But in storytelling, it is used to present an unsophisticated image of family members. In the story given in an earlier chapter, where young Hugh Ervin naively mistakes the ringing of an alarm watch for an appendicitis attack, he calls out to his mother, "My appendicitis done bust," and in the story where he describes driving the broken buggy home, he calls out to his father, "Pa, I can't hold the buggy. It's just running out the road, and I can't do nothing." These are not part of the normal speech of the family, but they are often used in stories whose central theme is the family's rural unsophistication.

Although family storytellers often use exaggeration to play on the stereotype of the country bumpkin, they also enjoy the shock of outsiders to their actual behavior. Going barefoot during the summer is common among both rural and town people during the summer, but not quite to the extent that the family carries it. The stories about barefoot cousins are many: a barefoot acolyte in the Episcopal Church, a mother insisting that her son buy a pair of shoes before going north to graduate school, a relative's frequent appearances at dances with formal attire and no shoes. It is a matter of competition among some relatives to be the first with feet tough enough in the summer to strike a kitchen match on the bottoms.

For some relatives, going barefoot has become a kind of family trademark. My youngest sister, who used to go to school with her shoes on and come home with them in her hand, was called "another barefoot Dargan" by one of her teachers. Most of the stories about barefoot cousins focus on the reaction of outsiders, which storytellers may exaggerate for the desired effect. Thus, while family members actually enjoy going barefoot, they also enjoy flaunting this kind of behavior in situations where they

know it is inappropriate. They take for granted that people in the area will know that they "know better" or that they can afford to wear shoes, even if they do not choose to do so.

In family stories, the urban person is often pictured as naive in a rural setting, where the country person is well adapted. Descriptions of "fooling" or impressing town friends visiting in the community are common. In Ned Dargan's description of a favorite childhood pastime, town friends are impressed by the art of tickling fish:

Oh yeah, when we used to fish. That was really a very successful project. Down at the Coggeshall Pond where we camped a lot. We had a regular campsite down there. It was on Long Marsh Branch. And there was an old break in the dam. There had been a big dam, and it was broken there. And there was a big cut. It had steep banks. And we, we'd swim in the break there. Good swift water and a place about as wide as this room, maybe a little wider. And along the bank were holes, old holes from tree roots and all. We'd get in there and swim around, splash around and play and all.

And we fished in there some too. Didn't catch very many fish with hook and line. But after we'd swim and play in there these fish would go up under the bank in the holes. And you'd just run your hand in there, and they'd just lay over in your hand. We'd grab them. We used to have a catfish hole. Catfish you have to hold pretty carefully. Had to really catch the catfish just right or we'd get away. And, uh, we'd have these town folks over there. Some of the holes are down so deep in four or five feet of water, and you couldn't get to them from the top. You'd have to go down under the water. Say, "We're going down here and tickle fish." And go down there and tickle a fish, come up and throw a fish on the bank, say, "All right," to these town boys. (T6)

Hugh Ervin was able to trick a town friend because of her lack of knowledge of rural plants and food:

Hugh: But we used to get sweet gum. You ever chewed any sweet gum?

Dargan Ervin: No sir.

Hugh: You cut into a sweet gum tree about that deep, and

the gum comes out. It's pretty clear. And you wait and let it stay about six or eight months, and it turns sort of white. And then it's ready to chew. And, uh, we'd get it, and you just put a little bit of it in your mouth at a time and keep adding to it. If you put in too much one time it'd stick to your teeth and you just couldn't talk. [laughter]

Well, we had, my sister Bess had a friend here, Sally Coker. She was a city girl, and I asked her if she'd ever chewed sweet gum. She said, "No." "Well, let's go down and get some." I said, "There's two big old trees down in the pasture." I got a big wad of soft, about as big as my thumb, a big wad of soft gum, put it in her mouth. And, of course, it just spread out all in her mouth and she couldn't talk. In those days used to have corn bread, make pones with corn bread, inch and a half thick and about four or five inches long. It was pretty dry, and I knew what that'd do. That'd just stick to the sweet gum. So, I got a piece of that corn, cold corn bread and told Sally, and she put a big hunk of it in her mouth and then she couldn't shut her mouth at all. That gum and old dried meal bread. And, oh, she was mad. And Mother got a, had plenty of cream in those days. She got a cup of cream and let her sip a little bit. Finally after about half an hour she got it out. [laughs] (T21)

Occasionally, the country relative is shown getting the best of "city folks" in their own game. Several family storytellers enjoy telling about the time Ida Ervin was threatened with suspension from college for going barefoot, and of how she outsmarted them by buying some shoes, cutting the soles off, and strapping the tops to her feet. Part of the humor of this anecdote is the implication that much of the sophistication of urban culture is superficial.

The Southern Stereotype

Another image which the family presents in stories is that of the clannish, close-knit Southern family. Family members know that their kinship relationships are complex and probably bewildering to many outsiders. Thus, many of their stories deal with the shock or confusion of outsiders to family behavior. One anecdote portrays a waitress's shock

when she discovers that each of the three men she is serving has two names in common with one other one: Evander Ervin Dargan, Evander McIver Ervin, and Evander Roderick McIver.

Another story describes the surprise of a perspective in-law when he discovered that his definition of "family" was not the same as that of the woman he planned to marry:

Lucas Dargan: You know, the Wares always referred to the family as "the clan." We've always considered ourselves clan-nish. Well, when Mary Ware got engaged to Bill, when Bill asked her to marry him, she said, "I will if the family approves." [laughter] He thought he just had to get her parents' approval. (FN2)

Another part of the Southern stereotype which occasionally appears in family stories is that of the rough, feuding, backwoods Southern family. One anecdote tells how Margaret Mansfield Ervin remarked at a family gathering that the first thing she noticed as different when she moved to the community from her home in the upper part of the state was that there were no rocks. Her husband, Vannie, responded, "Shucks, if we [the family] had, had rocks lying around like that, we would have killed each other by now." (FN2) Since there is no history of violence or feuding in the family, this is another example of how family members play on a stereotype which is not part of their actual self-image. This is usually done for a humorous effect and is not intended to be taken seriously.

A certain form of licensed rowdiness, however, is part of the family tradition. The parties held before the family weddings during the 1930s and 40s were occasions where a kind of ritualized rowdiness was allowed. The kind of behavior carried on at these occasions would

have been considered inappropriate in other settings, and there were some among the older generations who thought even these parties went too far.

Stories of the family wedding parties prompted Frances Dargan to say that when she was growing up in town the Dargans and Ervins were considered to be about "the wildest bunch around." She recalled hearing about the time the Dargans and Ervins chartered a bus to go to Vannie Ervin's wedding in Spartanburg, South Carolina. A banner was put on the side of the bus, which read, "The Weevil Will Wed," and handbills announcing a wedding party were thrown from the windows when the family arrived. There had been so much drinking on the trip that one relative had to be left on the bus until the wedding was over.

The most famous of the wedding parties were those held by the men on Witherspoon Island. An Easter Egg Hunt was held for Rick McIver several days before his wedding. Chicken eggs, goose eggs, and guinea eggs were saved for months before the party. When the party was held the eggs, some of which were rotten by this time, were thrown at the groom, who was allowed a few friends and relatives to defend him. A similar party was held for Ervin Dargan, but this time the objects thrown were fruit, which had frozen during a cold snap, and the groom got a black eye when he was hit with a frozen grapefruit.

Ned Dargan recalled the "Hanky Tea," which was held in his honor:

Well, at our weddings, when this generation got married, these weddings were really something. And, uh, they sound like a bunch of crazy people, but when we were married — I was, uh, married about a week from the time Mary Ware, first cousin, married. Lived where y'all live now. And, uh, they had a tea for us on Witherspoon Island. All the brides were just having teas every, half a dozen every week, a party or tea for the bride. And so the men said, "Well, we got to do something for the groom. So, we go"

have a tea in the river swamp for the groom." And said, "It's go' be a dress-up affair." Said, "Everybody" -- this was stag -- "everybody's got to wear a dress." [laughter] Said were supposed to wear an evening dress [laughs] and all the other proper things that go with it.

And we didn't have a bridge to the, to cross the lake to the island. Had a ferry that you pulled with your hands. And so we met out here and gathered and most of us went down to the ferry together. And, uh, practically everybody was in dresses. And before we left here, though, before we went on the island the few people that weren't in dresses, they took them and told them, said, "Well, you got to wear a dress." So they took off their clothes and put a sack, took a sack, a croker sack, or something, and put it over their head and cut a place for the arms. [laughs]

And then later on two or three people came over not properly dressed. And, uh, got a old sack that came out of a boat that was picked up at the lake there. Somebody had an old sack that they had carried fish in. And, uh, so one of the men there, Skin Patton, someone said, "Skin's not properly dressed. We got to get a dress for Skin." Somebody said, "Here's a sack we can make a dress out of." So they cut this old sack that had been full of fish, and, oh, it had a terrible odor. [laughs] Cut a place for his head, place for the arms, and put it on his -- pulled off all his clothes [laughs] and put a sack on Skin.

And, uh, it was a terrible smelling, a dirty old sack, and some of the folks thought that was pretty bad. They said, "Take that sack off Skin." Said, "He just ought not wear that old terrible smelling fish sack." And, "Put his clothes back on." So, some of the people started to take it off, and the others said, "No, you can't take it off. He's got to wear it." Had a big fight. They sort of picked up sides, about fifteen or twenty on each side. Some were go' take the sack off Skin, and some were go' keep the sack on him. [laughs] Everybody got involved in the fight about Skin Patton's dress. [laughs] And several of the people were injured in the fight. [laughs] Had to get a doctor [laughs] from town about one or two o'clock in the morning to tend to some of the men who got injured in the fight. [laughs]

Cullough Dargan: Ned, didn't you have invitations printed or written? I remember seeing one.

Ned: Yeah, uh huh, yeah.

Cullough: Because it had -- It was a "Hanky Tea."

Ned: Hanky tea, yeah.

Cullough: "Bring a pint wrapped in a hanky."

Ned: Yeah, yeah. [laughs] "A pint wrapped in a hanky."

Cullough: And you had corsages --

Ned: Yeah, we had corsages.

Cullough: For the honorees made of vegetables.

Ned: The two grooms were presented with corsages. [laughter]
(T6)

Descriptions of these and other wedding parties often have several episodes, which may be told together or as separate anecdotes. After describing the Hanky Tea, for example, Vannie Ervin went on to tell about events which happened after the party was over:

Well, Skin died a few years ago. Real attractive. But, anyhow, I think he always was real gleeful and proud of the fact that he collected two hundred disability insurance from the party, the tea. [laughs] Pulled so many joints out of joint. Said he collected two hundred in disability. But, uh, it's really hard to describe that. Now Ervin and I went over there to clean up the next day, and it just looked like a terrible massacre had taken place. There were panty hose and brassières and silk dress rags just strewn all, just torn up, all the clothes. It was something. There'll just never be another one like it.

And two of the boys from Atlanta had started back into town, and they were having car trouble. They were staying in town, and they got to the Darlington-Florence Highway and didn't want to stop because they knew the car would choke down, so they looked both ways and just drove in. And this patrolman just immediately pulled in behind them, driving into the main highway without stopping. And he said, "Get out." Said, "Sir," said, "we can't get out. We haven't got on any clothes." [laughs] Well, I think they had on their underclothes. "Well, come on and sign the ticket." So, they timidly signed the ticket, and they went on to their motel, hotel and got dressed and decided they ought to go talk to them and tell them the story.

So they went down to the highway patrol office on the front street. And said, "Let us explain this thing." Said, "We went out to a party at the Dargans and Ervins and we were just coming in." Said, "Oh, that party with the Dargans and Ervins. Well, sure we'll give you your money back." [laughs] They like to tell that. That was Buddy Morehead and I've forgotten the other one. But, uh, they, they always like to tell that story. In fact, I heard it not too long ago. (T11)

"Wedding stories" are favorites among the children of this generation, who seem to envy the "good times" their parents had when they were growing up. Tug Dargan told one of his favorite wedding stories:

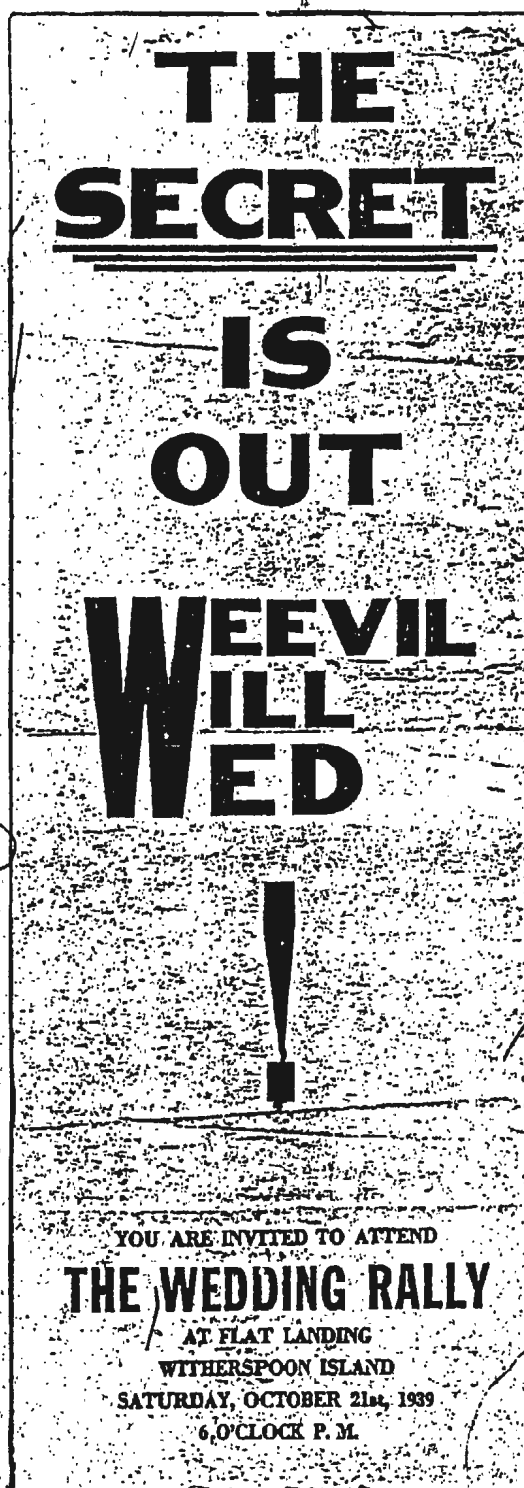


Fig. 27. Invitation to a wedding party.
[reduced from original]

At her [Frances Dargan Clarkson] wedding everybody came out -- I don't know whether -- and got up on the top of the hill, up where we used, you know, where we used to play, right at the very top and had a square dance right in the road. Of course, it was dirt. Wouldn't, wouldn't be a whole lot of traffic. Had a, just everybody got together and had a square dance right in the middle of the road. [laughs] I'd like, I'd listen to wedding stories all night long, especially that generation. (T5)

The family obviously enjoys the reaction of outsiders to these parties and weddings. Ily Jeffers, for example, told as an anecdote the episode of the "Hanky Tea" where the two guests were stopped by the patrolman. The anecdote, as she told it, had the two men explain to the patrolman from the car where they sat dressed in evening gowns that they had just been to a party with the Dargans and Ervins. The patrolman shook his head and said, "Oh, that explains it," and let them go without a fine. (FN2)

Tim Dargan described an incident from his father's wedding to show how an outsider reacted to the family's behavior:

Daddy had to wrestle Rick McIver for his car keys at his wedding. They were down in the road rolling around and fighting for the car keys. And my grandmother [his mother's mother], after we heard that Rick McIver was moving to Conway [where she lived], she said she'd just as soon have Hitler move. [laughter]. And that was at a time when, you know, Hitler was [laughter] on everybody's mind. (T5)

Family members also enjoy telling how Rosa Dargan reacted to the tussle between Rick McIver and Eryn Dargan by saying that she did not want Rick invited to any of her children's weddings. Rick later married her daughter, Mary Hart.

Another anecdote based on an outsider's reaction to family wedding parties was told by Hugh Dargan. Hugh invited his friend, Dick, to a wedding party on Witherspoon Island, but Dick, who had been to a previous

party, said that he had other plans. When Hugh said, "But I haven't told you what night it is yet," Dick replied, "I don't give a damn what night it is; I've still got other plans." (FNL)

Playing with images of the country bumpkin and the rowdy, clannish Southern family is a way of presenting different faces of the family to different audiences and situations. Although it often involves playing on a stereotype, the images presented are tied up with the family's sense of itself as a group. It contrasts "them" with "us" and gives a shape to a particular family identity. It also joins family members together in the knowledge of which images of family are being used and when and how they can be used. Embarrassing your sister by casually striking a kitchen match on your bare foot when her friend from town comes to visit might be acceptable behavior, but other situations require that the family be represented as sophisticated, educated, and well-mannered.

Respectable Behavior

This "respectable" side of the family is an important part of the family's self-image, but it is seldom the focus of family stories, partly because it does not lend itself as well to humor. More serious narratives about the accomplishments of ancestors present this image, and it also comes into stories about the inappropriate behavior of outsiders:

Bill Howard: You know, I haven't cared much for John Moore [name changed] since I went on one of the cousin hunts with him that we used to have down at Nightengale. [John was invited because he married the sister of an in-law.] I killed what I thought was a canvas back, but when John saw it he said, "If that's a canvas back I'll eat it, guts, feathers, and all." Then you [Lucas Dargan] came up, and you know your birds. You agreed that it was

a canvas back, and I was real proud of you. Then later on we went back to eat, and you know I didn't think anybody could say the blessing but Uncle Hugh. Well, before we could sit down good, Moore said the blessing. After that everything tasted like it had quinine water in it. [laughter] Ever since he said the grace, I haven't had a bit of use for him. [laughter] (FN1)

Off-Color Stories

There are many subjects of family storytelling which I have not covered in this chapter and, no doubt, many which I was not able to collect. Off-color stories, for example, are not part of the regular stock of stories told at family gatherings, but they are told occasionally among family members of one age group, or of one sex. Knowing that I was collecting stories to include in my Master's thesis probably kept some family members from telling me these stories, and the feeling against telling these stories across generations may have inhibited others. That one family member objected to even a very mildly off-color story being told to me was an indication of these feelings:

Vannie Ervin: But let me regress a little bit and tell you one way back about Grandfather and my father when he was a little boy. Uh, Father and Mr., I mean Grandfather and Mr. Janey Bacot were real good friends.

Margaret Ervin: Oh, don't tell her that.

Vannie: Oh, it's all right.

Margaret: Are you go' tell her about the swimming, or when the--

Vannie: Father said he was a little fellow and on one of these hot summer afternoons Grandfather said, "Hitch the horse to the surrey now, and let's go to the creek and take a little swim." Grandfather was a great swimmer. And he just always -- I remember him swimming with his moustache, I mean his beard sticking out in front of him going down the creek floating on the water. But, anyhow, Father said he hitched the horses, and they rode down by the Bacot Place and

picked up Mr. Janey and went on to the creek. Father said while he and Mr. Janey were undressing back of the big cypress tree, Grandfather had already stripped off and dived off the bridge and swam across the creek. And the creek was real low. And came swimming back. He always swam breast stroke. And Father said he and Mr. Janey were just getting in, and Mr. Janey said, "Evander," said, "I hear a carriage coming." Said, "It may be some ladies." He said, "Oh that's all right." Said, "I'll just duck under." And the creek was low, and he swam right up to the sandbar there. And when he got ready to duck under he couldn't get very far under. He just got his head under. Had his head under and his hind parts sticking out. And the carriage came cross the bridge. And Mr. Janey said, "Why Evander," said, "Those ladies saw your hind parts." And he said, "Well, that's all right, Janey." Said, "I'm sure they wouldn't know yours from mine." [Laughter] Or, "mine from yours." (T11)

In their stories and expressions family members are continually playing with the ways family lines are drawn, with inclusion and exclusion, and with images of insiders and outsiders. Often this involves a manipulation of different images of themselves. In doing this they frequently use both esoteric and exoteric images of themselves and of outsiders to draw a contrast between different family groups or the family as a whole and the outside world.

This chapter has examined the family's favorite topics of storytelling and the ways their collective identity is expressed in their verbal art. It has also shown how the family's sense of their past has shaped how they view themselves today. The following chapter will show how family members present images of themselves as individuals and as smaller kin groups within the larger family structure.



Fig. 28 Rosa Dargan's wedding photograph.



Fig. 29 The Hanky Tea, Witherspoon Island -- 1939.

CHAPTER VII.

VERBAL ART: INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY TRAITS

A favorite topic of conversation among family members is their complex kinships, figuring out how they are related to each other and to others who are not part of the close family group. They are also interested in the kinship relationships of outsiders. Strangers often are asked who their "people" are and where their roots are. If the stranger should happen to have a name which is common in the area, family members will ask if he is related to the local family. Like many others with roots in the area, they know which family names belong to certain communities, when the ancestors with these names settled in the area, and what characteristics have been associated with these families over the years.

They are interested in migration patterns as well as kinship patterns: how a family first came to the area and where members of a family settled after leaving the area. Benton Williamson remarked that at his graduation from a Tennessee university, what his father enjoyed most about the ceremony was reading the names and home communities of the graduates and observing where branches of many South Carolina families may have migrated.

Out of this interest in families and their complex interconnections, family members have acquired a knowledge of the characteristics of families and individuals who live in the area, as well as those which make up their own family group. These stock traits and characteristics are incorporated

into many of their stories and expressions. Together they compose a body of traditional attitudes based on images of family members known and accepted by most of the group. Without this knowledge most of the family's verbal art could not be appreciated or understood.

While the previous chapter included stories which presented images of the family community as a whole or of different generations of family members, the stories and expressions in this chapter show the family broken up into smaller groups: last-name families, nuclear families, extended families, and individuals, each with its own separate identity.

Most family members can readily name the characteristic traits of individuals and family groups within the community: the Ervins are entertaining, witty, and enjoy life; the Dargans are big-eyed and optimistic, adventurous and gregarious; the Williamsons are smart, peculiar, and reticent about family matters; the Howards are big eaters and expert hunters and fishers.

Traits of other branches of the family are also recognized, particularly physical traits, which may be observed in individuals several generations removed from the family whose trait they are supposed to have inherited. Family members can spot Williamson eyes and Williamson feet, an Ervin complexion, and a McIntosh mouth. Poor eyesight is inherited from the Evanses and deafness from the Harts. This association of traits with certain families can be seen in a mnemonic device used by one family member:

Bill Howard: I'll tell you something my mother told me to remember my grandmother's family. There were four McIver sisters who lived in Society Hill. The sweetest one married an Ervin, the prettiest one married a Law, the wittiest one married a Gregg -- you know the Greggs are known for being

witty -- and the one with most sense married a Williamson. (FN1)

There are family members who claim that they are not aware of these family stereotypes. They may, however, use the stereotype unconsciously. When I returned to the community to begin the fieldwork for my project, I asked one relative if he could describe the characteristics of the last-name families in the community. He replied then that he did not use stereotypes. But several months later he confessed that he had found himself talking about family traits; whereupon, he outlined to me in detail what he considered to be the characteristics of each family:

It does not matter that all members of a family group do not conform to their family stereotype. As one family member put it, "I don't think everyone in a family has the same traits. I just think of some people as being real typical of a family." Some persons are thought to be more like their last-name group, while the traits of others are traced to various branches of the family, which means that inconsistencies can be accounted for easily. A person who is unlike his father's family will be explained as being more like his mother's or his grandmother's side of the family. Or, the contradiction itself may be explained as a family trait. When confronted with the inconsistencies among members of the Dargan family, one family member said, "Well, that's another trait of the Dargans; they vary more."

Both heredity and the degree of the individual's contact with the family are given as explanations for a person's being more like one branch of the family than another. Frank Williamson observed a contradiction in his generation of Dargans between Ervin and Ned Dargan. He

pointed out that Ervin, like his father Benton and other Dargans, is a "plunger, adventuresome," while Ned is more conservative in business, taking fewer risks. Lucas Dargan remarked that although his brother Ned is not a "plunger" like other Dargans, his mother still called him a "big-eyed Dargan" because of his optimism and big ideas. She concluded that he was more like the Dargans and that Lucas was more like her side of the family.

Tim Dargan explained the difference between his father and the two brothers, Lucas and Ned, by the amount of time each spent growing up in the community. When the brothers' father died in the 1918 flu epidemic, they moved into town where they were raised almost entirely by their mother. Ned was older when his father died, and he still maintained a close tie with the community by spending most of his summers there working on the farm. Lucas was a baby when the family moved, had no boy cousins his age on the farms, and did not spend much time in the community until he moved back there after he married. For Tim, this accounted for Lucas being more like his mother's family; Ned, more like his father's family; and Ervin, even more like the Dargans.

The logic of these family stereotypes is incontrovertible, for not only can an individual's behavior be explained in terms of one or more branches of his family, but contradictions in the traits of the stereotype itself can usually be worked out to everyone's satisfaction:

Ervin Dargan: Always thought Vannie was more, uh, Dargan than Ervin.

AD: Why do you think that?

Ervin: He worries.

Lucas Dargan: Energetic too. He's got a lot of energy.

Ervin: Yes, he's extremely energetic.

AD: Do you think the Dargans worry more?

Ervin: Yes, I think the Dargans worry more.

AD: How else would you, what else would you say about the Dargans?

Ervin: Well, it's like your grandmother said about them, uh, "big-eyed." Yes, they're just big-eyed.

Lucas: And optimistic. Now, she said the Dargans are optimistic.

Ervin: Yes, very optimistic.

Lucas: Well, that's a little in conflict with this worrying business.

Ervin: Well, that's right. Yes, that's right. I don't know if "worry" is the right word, uh, Luke.

Lucas: Plan ahead. [laughs]

Ervin: Yes, you could say that the Dargans are, uh, a little bit more, I think, a little bit more tend to business, you know. Tend to think about that kind of thing. But not a whole lot, not a whole lot of worrying. You're right about the worrying and optimism don't go together.... I would say "concern."

Lucas: Yes, now that's right. You can be optimistic and yet keep your mind on things. (T1)

Knowing the characteristic traits of individuals and family groups is an important part of family storytelling. Family stories based on the personal experiences of family members usually draw on shared images of the kindred. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, within this tradition the best storytellers are those who have an eye for observing family and individual traits and who can use these skillfully in stories dramatized with imitative gestures. Praising Frank Williamson's storytelling skill, Tim Dargan said, "He can characterize people and places better

than anyone I know."

Most family stories center around the characteristic behavior of individual family members. Some focus on the idiosyncracies of an individual, while others tell how an individual exhibited typical family behavior. The lines connecting an individual with various branches of his family tree can be drawn in many ways. Depending on how they are drawn, one feature can be highlighted and made salient. Thus, one story may demonstrate how an individual exhibited an Ervin trait, and another will tell how the same individual did something typically Williamson.

Narrators can make the connection between an individual and a family trait by introducing their stories with phrases such as, "You know what big eaters the Howards are. Well one time..." or they may take a cue from the conversation, as in the following brief exchange. The anecdote is told here by an outsider, but the story exists in the family repertoire as well:

Lucas Dargan: I think the Williamsons generally are close observers. I think Frank is a close observer of things around the farm, and Mr., his father was.

Earl Gandy: Yeah, Mr. Ben -- I was down there one day and talking to him and Frank came up. He said, "Frank, there's a tobacco worm over on such-and-such a stalk on such-and-such a row. I want you to go and see about it. [laughs]"

Lucas: Yes, you know, I remember Bill Howard telling me that years ago. About Frank coming up there, and Mr. Ben saying, "Frank, there's a tobacco worm in your tobacco field over there." Said Frank knew what he meant. (T3)

These cues and explanatory statements emphasize which family trait the storyteller intends to portray and insures that outsiders and family members who may not be aware of the trait will understand the point of the

story. By using these statements, the storyteller can also draw members of the audience who know the trait into the performance by calling on them to affirm the knowledge they share.

Explanatory statements may come at the beginning or end of the story, or they may be embedded in the narrative. But sometimes a trait is so well known that no clues or explanatory devices are needed for the connection to be understood. Much of the family's storytelling depends on this shared knowledge for its effect. Even when the storyteller makes the point explicit, fully appreciating the stories may require associations and shared images of family members that an outsider would not have.

Individuals acquire these shared images through their own observations and those of other family members. Stories and other forms of verbal art play an important part in transmitting these observations. Lucas Dargan told me how he developed his impression of his father's family:

Mugga [his mother] used to say that the Dargans never carried a grudge. If they had differences they had it out right then and there, and that was the end of it. I mean, they'd just forget it. It might not be the end of it that day, but anyhow it was soon gone and forgotten. I've heard her say many times when they'd talk about some difference or some quarrel, uh, in the family, she'd say, "Well, the Dargans don't hold a grudge. That'll be gone." And so far as I could tell it was. I mean, at all the family gatherings everybody in travelling distance would be there.

Now, uh, I always thought of them as, uh, as being outdoor people: campers, and hunters, and fishers, fishermen and so forth. But, uh, I don't know that they were more than a lot of other people. But, of course, growing up in town my closest friends there came from families that didn't do so much of that. Not that there are not a lot of people in town that do camp and hunt and fish, but my particular friends just didn't do so much of that, and the Dargans did.

Well, I used to hear a lot of accounts Ned would give of their living out here every summer and working on the farm. And on those long summer days they would go fishing in Coggeshall's.

Pond or in Alligator Branch or Black Creek or Lowther's Lake after work and on Saturdays, if they weren't working on Saturdays, or on Sundays. Just did a lot of that. That's about my impression now. I really felt, uh, the pride I took in the Dargans was being, uh, maybe a little tougher than other people about camping and fishing and outdoor life. (T15)

The stock traits, or stereotypes, of last-name families form a kind of blason populaire within the larger family group.³ They are incorporated into the verbal art which one group tells about another group. Although negative blason populaire has received more attention from folklore scholars, much blason populaire is positive.⁴ This is especially true of the family described here, where the targets of these verbal labels are not really "outsiders" but small groups within the larger group to which all belong. In a large extended family such as this one, most family members have ancestors with the same last names as many of their relatives in the community. Thus, while a Dargan may tease an Ervin about certain Ervin traits, he may have as much or more "Ervin blood" as his Ervin relative.

This association of stock traits with families and family names appears to be common in many cultures. Robert Chambers, in 1847, published a collection of traditional verses, some of which were based on the stock traits of Scottish clans,⁵ and I have observed the use of

³ The term was coined by Alfred Canel in Blason Populaire de la Normandie, 2 vols. (Rouen: Lebrumant, 1859). It was later adopted by English-speaking folklorists.

⁴ Alan Dundes, The Study of Folklore (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 43.

⁵ Robert Chambers, Popular Rhymes of Scotland (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1847).

family stereotypes in various parts of the United States. In his book on oral history methodology based on research in African oral history, Jan Vansina recognized these stock traits in the slogans, called Kasala, which are applied to the various lineages of the Lulua. He suggested that when told about one's own lineage these slogans often express the ideals of the group.⁶

Ray Birdwhistell saw the use of personality stereotypes associated with families in a Kentucky community as "cushioning" devices, which reduced conflict and personal guilt by giving genetic explanations for individual behavior:

There was always sufficient range of difference within the four grandparents or eight great-grandparents to make the rationalization almost infallible. This "explanatory" mechanism, too, was of considerable importance in alleviating much of the extremely personal impact of Valley religion. Personal guilt could always be diffused and impersonalized by genetic examination.

Last-Name Families

The stock traits of the Ervin family used most often in verbal art are their attractive personalities, their wit, their unconcern with business matters, and their ability to enjoy life. One of the Dargans characterized the family by saying:

Well, the Ervins are, you know, real casual. And on the non-energetic side. Like Fulton, you know. And my

⁶ Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology, trans. H.M. Wright (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1965), p. 72.

⁷ Ray Lee Birdwhistell, "Border County: A Study of Socialization and Mobility Potential," Diss. Univ. of Chicago 1951, p. 72.

grandfather was not very energetic. And, uh, don't worry much. ... Good, good company. (Ti)

A similar description was given by another family member: "The Ervins enjoy life. They're real attractive people, but they are poor businessmen." Another relative's description was essentially the same: "The Ervins are not too concerned with business matters. They believe in taking things easy." He added that they are "staunch and honest in what they believe. I'd say they are typical Scots. They love life."

After talking about the Ervins' lack of concern with business matters, Bill Howard told an anecdote in which Hugh Ervin put the pleasure of his grandchildren before his business:

I went down there once and Uncle Hugh had run out of tobacco sticks just like he always did. He said, "Where can I get some sticks, William?" And I said, "I don't have any either, Uncle Hugh, but there's a pile of sticks over there." Said, "Oh, no, I can't use those. That's Henry's children's playhouse." [laughter] He wasn't going to use those because his grandchildren were using them for a playhouse. [laughter] (FN2)

Some attribute the Ervins' lack of business success to their being "not very energetic." This was assumed as understood in a remark made by a family member when he was told about a new pill on the market which was supposed to be invigorating, "The real test would be to give two to [one of the Ervins]. Dr. Sam Ervin, the great-grandfather of my contemporaries, is often quoted as saying during a discussion of various business opportunities, "When you come right down to it, nothing pays." The humor of the remark lies in the general feeling that neither he nor his brothers worked hard enough to make anything pay.

The work which the Ervins are known to avoid is the everyday drudgery of farm work, as other members of the family will admit. Hugh Ervin, for

example, was never very successful at farming, his lifetime occupation, but he was a carpenter and woodworker by hobby. He made furniture, lamps, and other objects, which he used in his home, or gave to other family members. His skill was appreciated by all of the family but was considered to be his recreation, not his work.

Part of the Ervins' charm is their ability to use language well. Some of the best punsters and storytellers are Ervins, and the expertise of those with other last names whose mothers or grandparents were Ervins is usually attributed to "the Ervin in them." The Ervins are also known as exaggerators, especially in their storytelling, and any use of exaggeration among the rest of the family is frequently met with remarks such as, "That sounds like an Ervin story," or, "You must have gotten that from the Ervins."

An Ervin trait that the younger generation stresses is the creativity of the family. Many of the artists, craftsmen, and inventors in the community are Ervins or Ervin descendants. Vannie Ervin developed the first tobacco harvester used in the area. Along with his cousin, Ervin Dargan, he also invented a barrel, or cylindrical, saw for cutting round sections from logs, which promotes a better utilization of the wood.

Several of the women and men in this family are talented carpenters, who have built houses, boats, and furniture; some are artists, architects, and potters. Unlike their parents and grandparents, many of the younger generation of Ervins are making careers using these skills.

Since I am a Dargan, there are probably many stories about Dargan family traits that I have never heard and will never be told. The material I collected on the Dargans, therefore, is probably less candid and more incomplete than on the other families. Certainly, there were more contradictions

in the stock traits attributed to the family, although, as I mentioned earlier, some family members say that this in itself is a Dargan trait. Frank Williamson, who married Sarah Dargan, named other characteristics he saw in the family: "Enterprising; not tied to location as much as the other families in the community; in business real hustlers." He added that "the Dargans are optimistic, which is one reason they are adventuresome."

Bill Howard suggested another Dargan stereotype when he said, "Well, I reckon they were the smartest and the craziest people around here. Man they were smart people from way back. They were leaders from just as far back as you can read. Man, I'm a great admirer of the Dargans." Lucas Dargan responded to Bill's characterization of the Dargans by telling about the time a woman was planning to marry one of the Dargan men and a friend of her family said, "You mean she's going to marry one of those crazy Dargans?" Bill added, "Well, the crazy Dargans were smart; they just kind of went crazy."

So far as I know, none of the Dargans was ever judged to be insane, but several were considered by their contemporaries to be "way out." Constant use and survival of stories about the "crazy Dargans" has perpetuated this stereotype. One of these characters was Charlie Dargan, known to the family and to people in town as "The Orator." He studied law but never practiced, and never worked for any length of time. Most people recall how he walked back and forth to the library dressed in a long black overcoat that nearly touched the ground and how he mumbled to himself. He was known for his love of speech-making and writing in which he used absurd combinations of literary references. A popular anecdote relates the remark he made after the Phillips Hotel where he was boarding

burned down, "Fire and I shall meet at Philippi."⁸

Another source of verbal art about the Dargans is the family's attitude toward organized religion. Lucas Dargan often remarks that he comes from a long line of preachers and agnostics. He tells about the time a preacher tried to convert his great-uncle, George Dargan, a known agnostic:

Then Uncle George, my grandfather's brother, uh, was reputed to be an atheist, but I, I suspect, I mean a lot of people don't distinguish between atheist and agnostic. And, uh, Uncle George was a very intelligent man. And, uh, I think Dr. Edwards, I told you what Dr. Edwards said about him. They got this new Baptist preacher here, Dr. Alexander. And he was coming from somewhere. He was a well-known preacher. And he said the first thing he was going to do was get George Dargan back in the church. That he should be in the church. He was go' get him back in the church. Well, Dr. Edwards, who was a stout Baptist himself, said, "Well, he went around to see," and said, "the first thing he found out was old man George Dargan knew more about the Bible than he did." And, of course, what he ended up doing was getting Dr. Alexander out of the church, which was right sad. (T15)

A more esoteric reference to the number of agnostics in the Dargan family is an anecdote which quotes one of the Williamsons during a controversy between the Dargans and the Baptist Church in Darlington, whose members wanted to build a parking lot over the cemetery where many Dargans are buried. When this relative was told about the Baptist preacher's argument that the souls of the dead rise to heaven anyway, he remarked, "That may be true, but I don't know if too many of those Dargans would rise."

Turning to the stock traits of the Howard family, the exceptional

⁸ An adaptation of the line by Brutus, in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, IV, 3. Brutus replies to the ghost: "Why, I will see thee at Philippi, then."

skill in hunting and fishing of members of this family and their love of these sports are the most common topic of family stories about them. One family member said that he did not know of a single time when the Howards had been fishing and had not caught anything, but he added, "Of course you never hear about the times they don't catch anything. They brag a lot." Several family anecdotes describe hunting or fishing trips when the Howards brought home the only catch, or more than anyone else:

Keith Williamson: Last winter we had a deer drive over here. We always had them on Tuesdays and that's cattle auction day at Lugoff Market. Armstrong [Howard] had to sell some cattle, so he couldn't come that day. He had to get up early to sell the cattle. And the drive was just an hour or so. It wasn't long. So he just walked out his front door and killed the only buck that came by. Charles [Howard] came by and Armstrong put the deer in his pickup and went on to the auction. That was the only deer killed that day. And he just walked out his front door and shot it. [laughs] (FN3)

Keith Williamson told another anecdote about one of the Howard's skill in fishing:

One year Jolly [Howard] took Charles [Howard] to the Agricultural Society Meeting at Mineral Springs. Charles was about five or six. You know Belly-Ache Branch that runs through there? (AD: Yes.) Well, you know they have speeches and eating and everything. It's a pretty serious sort of gathering. Charles got a little stick and some string and a safety pin or something and caught a fish in the branch. Daddy told me that one. (FN3)

The Howard's ability to hunt and fish is considered a developed skill, not luck. Other members of the family tell how the Howards are taught to hunt and fish from the time they are small, and it is generally believed that they can see and hear and sense better than other people. One family member said that he always watches Whitfield Howard on dove hunts and ducks when he ducks, because Whitfield can see the birds coming

before anyone else.

Two skills which the Howards have developed for hunting are the ability to be very quiet and to hide well. One family member claims that Whitfield Howard can hide in an open field, and Whitfield's friends in the family laugh about how quietly he walks even when he is not hunting. Frank Williamson told of the time Armstrong Howard was put on a deer stand when he was a boy. He hid so well and was so quiet that the adults had trouble finding him when the hunt was over.

The Howards are known for taking their hunting and fishing very seriously and for getting impatient with their companions who make too much noise. For this reason, they are good targets for practical jokes on hunting and fishing trips, and several family anecdotes describe the tricks played on them. Friends of Whitfield Howard tell of the time they greased with mud the log where Whitfield was fishing, then yelled, "Cottonmouth!"⁹ and watched Whitfield run down the log toward the bank and fall in the pond.

Frank Williamson named other traits of the Howards during a conversation about the family: "physical powers and endurance among the men" and "among the older men, pride in their trading ability." He added later that "they pay a lot of attention to eating." Bill Howard supported this last trait by saying that his uncle Fitz Lee Howard "had the reputation for being one of the biggest eaters around."

The Williamson family's best known traits and the ones used most in stories about the family were summarized by one family member when he said, "The Williamsons are smart, peculiar, and reticent. You know, they

⁹ A cottonmouth water moccasin snake, common to the region and feared because it is poisonous and silent.

don't tell you much about their business." When asked to describe the Williamsons, another relative, Bill Howard, replied, "Oh, sense. They're just loaded with sense, just everyone I've ever known."

A conversation between Lucas and Ervin Dargan revealed other recognized traits of the Williamson family, their conservatism and their reputation as "good performers:"

Ervin: Yes, they're, uh, extremely conservative and resistant to change. Neither of these, of course, are necessarily bad characteristics. They just believe in sticking with, uh, with the proven way of doing things.

Lucas: You mentioned that they're interested in the proven way of doing things, but they also study those ways. And they do it better than most people.

Ervin: Well, that's true.

Lucas: I mean, they're good performers, I think, characteristically. You know, that book on David Rogerson Williams has a, uh, little addenda or something about the Williamson plantation. Frank's grandfather. How everything was done so well, and it's just been almost legendary in Darlington County that Frank Williamson farms right, and his father farms right. I know one person told me after, said, "Now that Mr. Ben's gone, I guess Frank's got just as good a judgement as anybody in Darlington County."

Ervin: Yes, they have been very deliberate. And, of course, the Williamsons are extremely smart not to talk so much. You know that old thing about, uh, "It's better to be silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt." (T1)

The humor of a family anecdote, which is told both by the Williamsons and the Howards, is based on the stereotype of the Williamsons as being resistant to change. It tells of a time when Billy Howard was having dinner with one of the Williamson boys and was asked what he would like to drink. He asked for tea, but Sarah Williamson told him that her children were not allowed to drink tea until they were sixteen, to which Billy replied, "Well my parents told me never try to argue with a Williamson." (FN2)

When they are not trying to be funny or to tease their Williamson relatives, family members will argue that the Williamsons' conservatism is not so much a resistance to change as a cautious and deliberate approach to change. They point out how the family has improved farming in the area by developing new farming methods and new breeds of plants.

The Williamsons' reputation for being peculiar is usually illustrated with anecdotes about the unconventional behavior of individual Williamsons, one of whom will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Consciously unconventional behavior and total commitment to an idea or a cause are the usual examples given of Williamson peculiarities.

"Peculiar," as the family uses it, does not imply mental disorder, but unconventional, often eccentric, behavior. An individual's or family's "peculiarities" are some of the favorite topics of family storytelling. Like the example of the Dargan in-law given earlier, a Williamson in-law tells of how she was asked before her marriage, "You're not going to marry one of those peculiar Williamsons, are you?"

The Williamsons' good business sense is another well-recognized trait. Lucas Dargan told about the time when Mr. Ben Williamson showed good judgment in a business transaction, and concluded that this was typical of many of the Williamsons:

He [Mr. Ben Williamson] was peculiarly attentive to his business, farming and figuring it out and figuring it out right in many cases. He took a carload of tobacco to, uh, a market in Virginia once. You see, the Williamsons were one of the first to get into the tobacco business around here. And Frank has long generations. You see his father had been farming tobacco way back before a lot of people were, and they didn't have the market around here. And so he took a car load of tobacco to

Virginia and put it on the market, and, uh, it was pretty evident to him that people thought he had to sell because he was two hundred miles from home or something like that. And, uh, didn't bid high enough on his tobacco. Well, I don't know just what the arrangement was then. It might have been a little different from our auction market now, but, anyhow, he, he just astonished everybody by saying, "No," he wouldn't sell it. He loaded it back on the car and came home. And, uh, I think Mr. Ben told me this himself. He just came back and reworked it and took it back to the market in Virginia and sold it for a lot more. Said it was the best money he ever spent loading that thing back on the car and bringing it home, or something like that. But, uh, they're just attentive to business. (T15)

Another anecdote also centers on the Williamsons' keen business sense. Mr. Kenneth James, a relative of the Williamsons' who was in the fertilizer business, was advised by a friend to try to sell some fertilizer to the Williamsons. Mr. James put down the idea with the remark, "You don't sell to the Williamsons; they buy."

The Williamsons' image of themselves does not seem to differ greatly from the image other family members have of them. To describe themselves, they talk about their reticence and their cautiousness as dominant characteristics. Frank Williamson said, "The Williamsons are not communicative. They don't talk about their own business, and they don't talk about other people's business either." Frank said that the reticence of the family had kept even family history from being passed down to younger generations. He added later that "they're not over-optimistic in business [unlike the Dargans], and they're not very excitable."

Extended and Nuclear Families

Verbal art based on the stock traits of extended and nuclear family

groups is not as common as that which characterizes family members with the same last name. This does not mean, however, that these kinds of family groups do not have as strong an identity as the last-name group. Family members are aware of differences and distinctive traits at these levels, but apparently they are not as easily translated into verbal art as those which can be identified with a name.

This is apparent in a family trait associated with the Ervins. Among the other last-name families, exaggeration is considered an Ervin trait. All the Ervins living in the community now are descended from two brothers, Sam and Evander Ervin. Sam's descendants believe that it is the Evander Ervins who are "the exaggerators and braggers," but members of the other last-name families rarely make the distinction even if they are aware of it.

It is possible, however, that in my collecting I unconsciously stressed last-name families and particular individuals since I knew more stories about them. Perhaps I failed to think of the kind of questions to stimulate family members into thinking about other family groups. Drawing on my experience growing up in the community, however, I recall very few stories of this kind.

Individuals

Stories about individuals, like those about family groups, often center on characteristic traits and habits. These individual traits do not necessarily conflict with those of the last-name family; instead, they usually involve characteristics which make a person stand out as an individual from the family group. These traits are less stereotypic, and

thus the verbal art which incorporates them is more likely to have different emphases put on the same story when told by different tellers.

Stories illustrating individual traits often begin or end with an explanation of the trait being described. Hugh Dargan, for example, began an anecdote by saying that his Aunt Mildred was known for being extremely frugal. He went on to describe the time he and several cousins took a trip to the mountains in North Carolina. Around three o'clock in the morning they arrived at Mildred's home to pick up her daughter, Sarah. There was not enough cord to tie Sarah's suitcase to the running board, so they borrowed some from Aunt Mildred. After the suitcase was secured, they cranked up the car and started off. Before they reached the highway, someone saw Mildred running behind them, waving her arms and calling, "Don't forget to bring the cord when you come back!" (FN1)

Just as frequently, however, the story is told without an explanation. This is most likely to occur when the trait illustrated in the story is well known and when the audience consists entirely of family members who knew the person described. In a short family anecdote, Lucas Dargan, explained his main point in telling the story, to illustrate Bill Howard's ability to make smart remarks, and assumed his audience's knowledge of the sisters, Mildred and Bet Ervin's, closeness with money:

You know Bill Howard is pretty sharp. I've heard other people quote him often. One time there was a wedding in the family, and someone said that only close cousins were invited. Bill said, "I guess that'll be Milly and Bet." [laughter] (FN1)

The same story may be told by separate performers to illustrate different characteristics of an individual. As a result, the performances of a story on separate occasions by separate narrators may vary slightly

according to which trait is emphasized. When Bill Howard told a family anecdote he emphasized Ned Dargan's characteristic politeness:

Ned used to visit Vannie a good bit, and Uncle Hugh said that Ned was the best-mannered child he ever saw. He'd always sit quietly at the table and never interrupt anybody talking. Uncle Hugh said one day he was out on one of the fields behind the place talking with Mr. Abbott, and Ned came running toward them, "Uncle Hugh, Uncle Hugh!" Uncle Hugh said, "Ned, I'm talking with Mr. Abbott right now." Said Ned danced first on one foot and then on the other, but he waited until they had finished talking. Then Uncle Hugh said, "All right, Ned, what was it you wanted?" "Uncle Hugh, your house is on fire!"

Ily Ervin Jeffers introduced the same anecdote by saying, "Ned talked so slow and was so polite." In her performance, she emphasized how slowly Ned talked as well as his politeness:

Father was out on one of the fields talking with someone when Ned came running up, "Uncle Hugh." [imitates slow drawl] "I'm talking now, Ned." Father said anytime there was a lull in the conversation, Ned would try to interrupt, "Uncle Hugh." [imitates drawl] Finally Father said, "Now, Ned, what do you want?" "Aunt Ida said to come home. The house is on fire." [imitates drawl] (FN1)

Family members love to poke fun at their relatives' weaknesses, strengths, habits, and eccentricities. Their verbal art covers a wide range of individual traits, from Ned Dargan's politeness to Gus Ervin's hot temper:

Richard Howard: He had a ferocious temper. When Uncle Gus got mad he would, he'd fight. He, he was, when Uncle Gus got mad and somebody insinuated that, uh, what he said wasn't so, well you just had a fight on your hands right there. There was no backing out. You had a fight.... Gus, when he had his leg, he had one leg amputated a few years before he died and it didn't stop him from going one bit. And he was in the courtroom one time, and some lawyer insinuated that he, uh, wasn't truthful. And Uncle Gus threatened him right there in his wheelchair. "You son-of-a-bitch, I'll just kill you right now." (T20)

It is the set patterns of behavior, the things which persons do over and over, which especially delight storytellers and their listeners. Family members who become "set in their ways" are favorite subjects of storytelling. A family photograph helps to preserve the memory of how for all of her life Rosa McIntosh Dargan refused to be photographed. When she became engaged to marry Edwin Dargan, her family insisted that she have a wedding picture made. She finally relented but only if she could go to the photographer alone. When the photograph arrived, virtually all that could be seen was a mass of bridal net. For the portrait, Rosa had covered her face with her veil. (See photograph, p. 184)

Equally "set in his ways" was a McIver ancestor who always refused to let his family move any piece of furniture in the house. After years of following his wishes, his family finally learned the reason. When he was a child, he and his brothers would warm themselves in front of the fire before going to bed. Then they would run from the fire to their room and dive into bed. One night their mother had changed the furniture without telling them, and when they dove for the bed, they landed on the hard floor.

Narratives and expressions which focus on family and individual traits are one of the ways by which some of the different family groups express and maintain their separate identities. These trait stories employ both esoteric and exoteric ideas since they are the way a family group presents itself and a way one family group characterizes another. Family members belong to several family groups within the community. Many of the Ervins are part Dargan, and many of the Dargans are part Ervin. In storytelling they can select which sense of family membership to use for a

particular occasion. They can "explain" an individual's behavior as idiosyncratic or as typical of one or more branches of his family. These stories are an attempt to find patterns in family and individual behavior and to use those patterns to identify the families and individuals they describe.

CHAPTER VIII

THREE FAMILY CHARACTERS

The most complete portraits of individuals presented in the family's verbal traditions are of family "characters," those persons who have distinctive traits and habits which are peculiar or unconventional by other family members. Most of these characters are also regarded by outsiders as eccentric, although the traditions about them may not be as strong. The two previous chapters showed how individuals and family groups are portrayed in verbal art. This chapter focuses on the images which emerge from traditions surrounding three individuals: John Ervin, Joe Dargan, and McIver Williamson.

Each of these men grew up and spent most of his life in or near the family community. John Ervin, the oldest, was born in 1850 and died in 1907. Joe Dargan was born in 1893 and died in 1969. McIver Williamson was born in 1862 and died in 1940. Although there are other family "characters," including several women, these three are named most often by family members and have more stories told about them than most of the others.

For each man a brief biographical sketch is given along with a description of the way he is portrayed in family stories. This is followed by a comparison of the lives of the three men, designed to show common characteristics which may have led to their being considered peculiar. Finally, a contrast is drawn between the traditions surrounding each man to suggest differences between images which draw on personal experience

and those which have come down through two or more generations, and between traditions which have remained within the family and those which have spread to the surrounding region.

John Fulton Ervin

John Fulton Ervin, one of six sons of Harriet McIver and Samuel Fulton Ervin, and the youngest of four to survive infancy, was born on Christmas Day, 1850. He never married but carried on a courtship with one woman for many years, paying visits to her every Sunday. No one in the family recalls his ever working for a living, and most agree that if he ever did, it was not for long. He was supported by members of his family for most of his life. He was in the army for a while, however, and served during the Spanish-American War. When he was not living with members of his family, John lived in a cabin on Witherspoon Island. He died on October 23, 1907.

Since John spent several years on Witherspoon Island, the island is the setting for many of the stories about him. Ervin Dargan recalled hearing of how he took baths in Lowther's Lake while living on the island:

The only thing I remember about him was living on the island and taking his baths in the lake in the winter. You know, he said, "It's cold, but a man got to wash." [laughter] (T17)

Richard Howard, among others, had heard of how John swam across the lake to get to Witherspoon Island:

He drank a lot and he was a little bit off too. John Ervin, uh, he, he'd start to the island, and he'd start walking down the hill, and he'd start hollering, "John Ervin's coming

down the hill. All the women better get out the way." And by the time he got to the bottom of the hill he didn't have a rag of clothes on. And he'd have them in a little bundle, and he'd put them right on his head and swim the lake. Get out on the other side and get dressed and go right on. (T18)

Richard Howard also remembered hearing Hugh Ervin describe John's nightly routine during his summers on the island:

He lived over on the island a lot. And, uh, Uncle Hugh would go over there and stay with him some. And, uh, you know they didn't have any mosquito repellent or anything then. And the mosquitoes in the river swamp in the summer time are just horrible. And, uh, so Uncle John would, uh, he got ready to go to bed, he cut on all the lights in the cabin. Said he had the biggest old hands. Said he'd get to clapping those hands and singing and just making all the fuss. And Uncle Hugh would ask him, said, "John," said, "What you doing this for?" He'd sayd, "Calling all the mosquitoes, Hugh." Said, "I don't want them with me." [laughter] And then all of a sudden he'd just jump out one of the doors and run to another cabin where there wouldn't be any lights, and he'd sleep over there. [laughter] (T18)

John's "drinking problem" is the subject of several stories about him. One of the best known anecdotes about John related a misunderstanding resulting, in part, from his known love for drink. It is also one of several stories about John's relationship with another unmarried relative, Kitty Gregg, who often stayed with members of the family. Mary Ervin Thompson, who remembers John vaguely, said, "The outstanding thing I remember about him was the fights he used to get in with Cousin Kitty Gregg." Kitty is mistakenly called Betty in this version of the anecdote:

Margaret Ervin: Well, there was one, uh, one of Father's uncles, Uncle John, who, uh, they had a lot of tales on Uncle John. I don't remember too many of them. But one of them I always remember. He, he never married, and he used to stay here with Grandfather and Mammy some and then over at Uncle Sam's some. They lived over next door. And he'd stay around. There were four Ervin brothers, and he was the only one that didn't ever get married.

He would stay with the other three.

Then there was some cousin, Cousin Betty. I don't know what relationship she was. She used to come and visit occasionally. And there were a lot of girls in the family, and they didn't have but one spare bedroom. And so when Cousin Betty came Uncle John had to go over to Uncle Sam's. And, uh, one night he had eaten supper here and was go' go over there and sleep. And so he, uh, wanted to smoke his pipe or something before he went, before he went over there, and he was looking for a match. Grandfather said, "Well, I don't have a match." Said, "Don't you have any?" He said, "Well, I've got some up in the room, but, uh, Betty's up there." Well, Uncle John was known to be right fond of drinking, so he went up, and didn't talk so plain either. And he said, "Betty, Betty, hand me my matches, hand me my matches." [imitates scratchy voice] And Betty — He heard this scrambling around in there and said after a while she opened the door and threw the mattress right in his face and said, "Take your mattress you old drunk fool." Said, "I wouldn't sleep on it for anything." [laughter] (T8)

The same incident, told by some other members of the family with a little more emphasis on John's drinking habit, ends with Kitty saying, "Take your old mattress, John Ervin. You're a fool with drink," and John replying with a standard retort, "And you're a fool without."

Two of John's distinctive traits were his loud voice and his tendency to talk constantly. Mary Ervin Thompson said that in her family household saying, "All right, Uncle John," silenced her brother David when he was talking too much. John talked constantly not only among other people but also when he was alone, which contributed to the feeling that he was "a bit off" and led to the saying, "You could hear him before you could see him." Willie Ervin recalled hearing that John was called down in the army for talking to himself:

Well, I think he was kind of cracked really. I, I know, think he was in the Spanish-American War. And he talked to himself quite a bit. And they were all standing in rank, and he was mumbling to himself. And the Sergeant said, "Ervin, shut up." Said, "I ain't said a word. I ain't said a damn word." And he went on talking. [laughs] And, uh, he was quite a character. (T12)

John, like several of the Ervin men, was known to be exceptionally strong:

Bill Howard: They say he went in the Spanish-American War, got drunk one time and they tried to put him in jail. And they say he whipped the whole regiment. They never did get him. (FN2)

Another example of John's strength is a variant of the description of his swimming the lake with a bundle of clothes on his head. It describes how he swam the lake holding his clothes out of the water with one hand.

Terms such as "off," "cracked," and "crazy" are used by family members to describe John Ervin, and there is very little affection for him expressed in family stories. This is partly because few family members knew or remember him. Even one family member who did know him, however, said, "Uncle John was not one of my favorites," a statement which in this family is an expression of strong displeasure.

Partly because only a few of the oldest family members knew John Ervin personally, there is not a very clear picture of him as an individual. There are no descriptions of his appearance, and although some of his traits and characteristic habits are well known to many members of the family, the verbal art about him tends to draw less on esoteric knowledge than that about Joe Dargan.

He was named as a "character" more by the older generations of the family than by the younger generations, many of whom know him only as the central figure in a few family anecdotes. He is considered a character not because there are so many traditions about him, but because his traits and habits were considered unconventional.



Fig. 30 Joseph Flinn Dargan.

Joseph Flinn Dargan

Joseph Flinn Dargan, the youngest of ten children of William Edwin and Mary Hart Dargan, was born on November 11, 1893. He was considered to be a smart child but contracted typhoid fever and ran extremely high fever when he was about sixteen, and the family believes that his mind was never the same afterwards. It was quite evident after the illness that his memory, though surprisingly good for things in the distant past, was very uncertain for day to day business. Being the youngest child in a large family and handicapped by his illness, he was spoiled by his mother and his older brothers and sisters, and his relatives give these as the reasons for his being lazy when he was older. Jolly Howard expressed the general feeling in the family when he said, "Joe could have done more if he had had to."

In spite of his illness, Joe went on to Clemson College in South Carolina. After serving in the Navy during World War I, he came back to his home in Darlington and worked in various jobs, but he was unsuccessful in all of them. One relative said that after Joe left his job selling insurance "it took them years to straighten out behind him."

Joe was considered an authority on John Ervin, a generation his senior, and was mainly responsible for keeping the traditions about him alive. He was one of John's favorites, and members of the family recall hearing that when Joe was a small boy, John often came by the Dargan house to take him for a ride. If John was drunk, as he often was, Joe's mother would tell him to come back when he was sober, and he usually did.

Like John Ervin, Joe never married, but carried on a courtship with one woman for over twenty years, a relationship which is the source of

several family anecdotes and descriptions. He lived with his mother until she died, leaving him the family home "because she knew he would never be able to support himself." He eventually lost the place during the Depression, but his brother Benton bought it back and assumed much of the responsibility for Joe's finances.

After that Joe lived with various members of the family. His brother-in-law, Hugh Ervin, with whom he lived for many years, once told Joe that he had to work and sent him off to Florida, where he worked in a laundry for a few years, a job in which he took great pride and which he "talked about for the rest of his life." Other than this job and his job at the Navy Yard in Charleston during World War II, Joe contributed very little toward his own support.

Although considered something of a burden, Joe was a beloved member of the family and was a special favorite of the younger generations. He was nicknamed "Deacon Joe" by one of his nephews because of his great pride in being elected a deacon in the Baptist Church. He was and still is remembered as a family "character" because of his strong, peculiar habits. As one family member said, "He did such set things, and he did them over and over." His weaknesses were tolerated because he was part of the family, and family members understood and loved him.

He became well known outside the family community when he moved to the Darlington Hotel for the last few years of his life, but the attitude of the town people toward him was not as tolerant as that of the family. This was particularly true of the younger generation in town, who knew Joe Dargan only as a shabbily-dressed old man who wandered the streets. Tug Dargan told how he felt when he heard his town friends talk about his great-uncle:

Tug: Well, like some of my friends they, they didn't know, you know. The idea of showing disrespect to one of my relatives, you know. I just never thought about it or never heard about it. It just really was a shock to have, just to catch people off-guard that didn't know that he was my uncle. It was probably, you know, just a, you know, "Who's that old --." And it upset me really bad, because, you know, you have no, you have no privilege to talk about this man, because he's, he's Uncle Joe.

Tim Dargan: That's right.

Tug: And he's a classic character. (T5)

Deacon Joe died on March 18, 1969, and is remembered by all except the youngest generation of the family in the community. Thus, the verbal art about him often assumes a common knowledge of his characteristic traits and habits. An anecdote told by Bill Howard, for example, depends for its effect on the shared knowledge of Joe's characteristic laziness and history of unemployment:

You remember when Joe was living in the Darlington Hotel. Well, after the hotel burned I asked Joe if he had lost anything in the fire. He said, "Confound it, I escaped with only my working clothes." [imitates Joe's husky voice] [laughter] [shakes his head] He never did a lick of work in his life. (FN1)

Bill's remark, "He never did a lick of work in his life," was added for emphasis, for the audience appreciated the humor of the anecdote without the explanation.

Imitations of Joe's husky voice, his shaking from Parkinson's disease, and his manner of speaking are frequently employed since they can be appreciated by those who knew him. His characteristic exclamations, "Aw thunder" and "Confound it," used by several family members in regular conversation as a self-conscious imitation of Joe, are also used in stories in which he is a central character. Ervin Dargan's description of Joe

drinking whiskey and Lucas Dargan's response show how the verbal art about Joe draws on shared recollections:

Lucas: You know, I wasn't around Uncle Joe as much as a lot of you. I don't ever remember seeing him really having had much too much to drink.

Ervin: Hardly ever. That was the remarkable thing. He'd drink a good deal but he'd hardly ever show it. And he'd shake. You remember how his hand would shake. (Lucas: Uh huh.) Well, when he got ready to take a drink he'd go up on it like a bird dog (Lucas: Yeah. [laughs]) and grab it and get it there and not spill a drop. [imitates motion] (Lucas: Yeah. [laughs]) He'd shake everything else.

Lucas: Yeah. I can see him right now back in our den back there. Talking, reach down and get it with both hands. I remember. (T19)

Among Joe's characteristic traits which have been preserved in family anecdotes are his driving habits. He often failed to stop at stop signs or when coming out of driveways, but blew his horn to warn oncoming cars. He rarely drove faster than 35 miles an hour and frequently drove in the middle or on the wrong side of the road. Thus, one relative who continually drove in the passing lane of a four-lane highway was teased of inheriting the tendency from his great-uncle Joe.

Joe's eating habits are another source of family stories. The settings for most of these stories are the Thanksgiving hunts on Wither-spoon Island and the birthday suppers which his nephews held for him every year. On these occasions he was served his favorite foods and drink: chittlins,¹ squirrel stew, and whiskey, and he was known for his ability to consume large amounts of all three.

¹ Small intestines of a pig.

Ervin Dargan: He could, uh, he could eat so. I remember one time we were having supper for him down in our cabin on the big pond. And you were there, Luke.

Lucas Dargan: Yes, I think I made all of those.

Ervin: And I turned a pot of chittlins over in back of the station wagon on the way down there. And I raked them up with the sand and all in them. And Deacon ate about half of them. [laughter] And then he ate more squirrel than anybody else. (T17)

Richard Howard suggested that a large dose of some of his favorite foods once saved Joe's life:

Well, you couldn't go, a Howard boy couldn't go to the Thanksgiving hunt until after he'd finished highschool or, uh, he was eighteen years old. And, uh, so my first hunt was, uh, in the fall of fifty-four. And, uh, it was a, a real interesting hunt. I never will forget it. Uh, Cousin Joe Dargan was real sick, and, uh, he'd lost a lot of weight, and he was down to skin and bones. And of course I got over there and it was my first time there and my father asked me to take good care of him because thought that would be his, take good care of Joe because it would be his last time over there. Everybody knew he was go' die.

So, Daddy was drinking, uh, Black Label Jack Daniels, and Joe was shaking so bad that I'd have to pour his whiskey in a coffee tin cup. And, uh, you know when you pour about two fingers deep in a coffee tin cup, that's a pretty good drink. And, uh, after about the third drink Joe stopped shaking. [laughter] And, uh, we sat him down to supper and, uh, had chittlins and sausage and grits and sweet potatoes. And we put about half a cup of sausage grease on Joe's grits. And when I came home for Christmas, Joe was well. And they decided that Joe had just been wormy and we had wormed him out with that grease. [laughter] (T18)

Some of the narratives about Deacon Joe concern his devotion to his alma mater, Clemson College, most evident each year during the football game between Clemson and its arch-rival, the University of South Carolina. Joe was always invited to his relatives' homes to watch the games on television, and his behavior was a source of much amusement:

Willie Ervin: You know, Joe was, Joe was funny. And Joe always, you know how Joe used to always come every -- He was a big Clemson fan, see. And, of course, I was born and raised, my family was Carolina, because Mother was born and raised on the campus. And Daddy, uh, went to Carolina after he finished Davidson. And Joe, Joe would always be invited to dinner for the Carolina-Clemson game. In fact, he'd get there about eight o'clock in the morning. And so he'd sit up and he'd, Mother would say, "Well, the game doesn't start until two o'clock." So he'd come back at ten thirty, eleven. [laughs] And it used to be such a thing. He'd always bring a little nip, see. And if Clemson scored he'd have a little nip and if Carolina scored he'd have a little consolation. [laughs] So he'd usually be about gone after that game. But he was, he was funny. (T12)

Members of the family who knew him well say that Deacon Joe never threw anything away. Bill Howard said, "It took a man to tote his hunting coat," and explained that Joe kept every shell he had ever bought in the coat. "It weighed so much he'd have to rest every few minutes when he was hunting," Bill added. Vannie Ervin enjoys telling how he went through Joe's things after he died. Vannie said that the stacks of newspapers, which Joe never threw out, were a calendar of his activities during the year, for sandwiched between the papers were items such as fishing line and shotgun shells, which reflected his interests during each season.

Joe was considered an expert raconteur, and many of his songs, recitations, and stories are remembered and cherished by the family. Family members recall how he entertained them at picnics and camps with his stories and poetry, and how he would lead them by "lining out" his favorite songs. The recitation, "Little Robert Reese," and the songs, "Two Old Crows" and "Modern Maiden's Prayer," family favorites from Joe's repertoire, were written down several years ago by Ily Ervin Jeffers, and copies were distributed to members of the family.

Many of the stories from Joe's own repertoire are still told by family members. Among these, the ones which he told on himself are the most popular. In his personal experience narratives Joe presented himself as naive and foolish, as in his story of his World War I navy duty as an armed guard on a merchant ship:

Ned Dargan: And there was one other thing he used to tell. He told these stories. Oh, he told about the -- We'd make him tell it year after year, about when he was in the Navy. Took great pride in his Navy career. And, uh, told the story about being on watch on the deck there. And he'd tell everything, how they were watching for submarines or enemy ships. And, uh, he said, "Ahoy! Anoy!" [laughs] "Light aft!" [imitates Joe's husky voice] [laughter] And the first mate, "What is it Dargan?" "A light aft on so-and-so!" Said, "Where is it Dargan?" "Light aft on so-and-so!" "Oh, you damn fool, that's the moon rising." [laughter] (T6)

Another of Joe's favorite anecdotes was told by Vannie Ervin:

Getting back to Mr. Clopton and Deacon Joe. When the circus came down, Deacon Joe, Mr. Clopton got Deacon Joe up as a little boy to go in to see the circus. Of course in 1904 Deacon was a real little fellow. And they got to the, walked to Darlington [7 miles] and, uh, said got to the railroad. And Mr. Clopton said, "All right, now, shine your shoes here in the grass." Deacon Joe said, "Well, I haven't got on any shoes." "Well, shine your toe nails." [laughter] He shined his toe nails in the grass. While Mr. Clopton was shining his shoes, he [Joe] kicked the railroad, the rail and knocked off his big toe nail. Had to go home. Didn't get to see the circus. And Deacon Joe used to like to tell that. (T11)

Joe loved to hunt and fish, but his hands shook so badly that he was never very successful at either. Richard Howard said that Joe was such a poor shot that he was the only person allowed to hunt the pet squirrels which stayed around the cabin on Witherspoon Island. Descriptions of his peculiar hunting dress, of his unconventional methods of hunting, and of his getting lost on Witherspoon Island during hunting trips are a regular part of the stories about him. A favorite of these stories was told

by Richard Howard:

Joe had taken Whitfield. Whitfield must have been about, oh, fourteen years old, I guess. And they had gone down Ervin Road and crossed those sloughs over towards Lowther's Lake and got lost. And, uh, it was a cold, bitter day. And, uh, everybody was looking for them. My father had driven his pickup truck down Ervin Road, and he stopped, and he hollered a time or two and Joe answered him. And, uh, they would have to wade these sloughs to get back. And, uh, finally Joe got over there to the last slough that separated he and Daddy and just told Daddy that he couldn't make it. Couldn't make it any further, that he'd given out and that that was it. So, Daddy, Daddy was telling him, said, "Joe," said, "Uh, I've got a bottle of Jack Daniels over here that I haven't even cracked the seal on yet." And Joe said, "Confound it," said, "I'm coming. I'm coming." [imitates Joe's husky voice] And he came right 'cross that water. He'd been hunting in tennis shoes and one shoe was gone. He was barefooted one foot. Breaking the ice. [laughter] (T18)

Ned Dargan told another story involving Joe's unconventional hunting methods:

Cullough Dargan: Didn't he lose his false teeth once?

Ned Dargan: Oh, yeah, I think he had shot a squirrel, and it went in a stump. He was trying to get the squirrel out and lost his teeth. Later he went back and found them, and he was telling us about it. Said, "I found them, and I put them back in." [imitates Joe's voice and gesture of putting teeth in mouth] He didn't even wash them off. (FN3)

Joe's attempts at fishing are usually recalled with a description of how he would drive off with his poles sticking out of the car window and of how the lines would catch on a tree or the side of a barn and unwind all the way to the fishing hole. When his fishing lines got so tangled that he could not use them, Joe would put them aside and buy new ones. He never threw anything away. These balls of line and tackle are now considered family treasures. One hangs from a tree near the spot where Joe used to fish, and another hangs in the real estate

office of a family member.

Joe's memory was the subject of much of the verbal art about him. He was known for being able to remember minute details from the distant past, but few details of the present. Relatives tell how he could recite backwards and forwards the names and addresses of his class at Clemson College, and he could do the same, they say, for the men on his ship in the Navy. Descriptions of his forgetfulness resemble standard absent-minded professor stories, such as the one which describes how he used to drive to town, forget that he had brought his car, and hitch a ride back home.

The picture of Joe Dargan which emerges from the traditions about him is that of a man incapable of working to support himself but with a number of interesting and entertaining characteristics, including his drinking and eating habits and his skill as a raconteur; a man not fully competent mentally, but with remarkable retention of detail in his favorite memories; a burden to his family at times, but charming and "always a gentleman." He is a well-loved member of the family, this love expressed not only in the stories told about him, but also in the value placed on things associated with him: copies of his songs and recitations and the tangled masses of fishing twine he left in his cabin.

Evander McIver Williamson

Evander McIver Williamson was born on June 21, 1862, in Springville, a community in Darlington County where his family had a summer house, but he spent his childhood at the family farm, Oaklyn. Later, the family moved to another Williamson home, Mont Clare, in the neighboring community,



Fig. 31 Evander McIver Williamson.

Mont Clare, which took its name from the Williamson farm.

Mr. McIver attended Davidson College in North Carolina for a short time, but was dismissed, reportedly for tying a calf to the school bell rope. From there he went to South Carolina College, now the University of South Carolina, from which he was graduated. He also went to Eastman National Business College in Poughkeepsie, New York, and later read law in Charleston, South Carolina.

In 1885, he returned to operate the family farm, Mont Clare. He married Harriet Ervin, his first cousin once removed, in 1907, when he was forty-five years old. They had one child, Evander McIver, Jr. McIver Williamson died at Mont Clare on March 14, 1940.

Mr. McIver is well known as a "character" both within the family and in a large surrounding area embracing several counties. He is considered by many to be the "chief legendary character" in the area. There is even some evidence of traditions about him in other parts of the state and in neighboring states. A neighbor, Earl Gandy, suggested that the number of stories in circulation about Mr. McIver was great when he said, "There are more stories about him than in the Bible."

Although he eventually married at the age of forty-five, tradition still retains some image of Mr. McIver as a bachelor. Like Joe Dargan and John Ervin, he carried on a courtship with the same woman for many years. The various excuses he gave to postpone the wedding, as well as his kind but overly-protective and often inconsiderate treatment of his wife, are the subject of many family narratives. His wife once observed that he was already "set in his ways" by the time they were married. These set patterns, acquired during the years when he was single, are recalled in many stories and descriptions.

The picture of Mr. McIver which emerges from these stories is that of a brilliant but eccentric man, consciously unconventional, benevolent to the poor, and totally dedicated to the causes in which he believed. Most of the anecdotes center around his idiosyncracies. His driving habits were unconventional. He is quoted as saying, "Anybody who drives a car should be able to drive as well backwards as forwards," and several anecdotes describe occasions when he backed his car a long distance, the longest being the eight miles from his house to Darlington. More realistic descriptions tell how he backed his car down the long driveway from his house until he reached the main road. His driving is remembered also for the board windshield which he put in to replace the glass, which he felt was dangerous. He was also known for scaring his passengers by driving fast between two trees in the woods where there was only a little room to spare.

His dress is described as equally peculiar, particularly for a man of his means: his shirts held together at the neck with a large safety pin and cut off at the waist with a draw string through the hem; his ragged pants with the pockets sewed up to allow only two fingers to fit through; his mismatched shoes with tire treading tacked onto the soles; and his entire wardrobe soaked in linseed oil to preserve it. These are the subject of many family narratives and narratives told by outsiders.

Another practice that was considered peculiar was his tendency to buy things in large quantity. Ervin Dargan told of how Mr. McIver got tired of losing pliers, so he bought a bushel of them and scattered them around his house. Probably because of this trait, a well-known American joke has become attached to Mr. McIver:

Tug Dargan: Mr. McIver wrote Sears and Roebuck, like he wrote them about pliers, and said, "Dear sir, Send me a, a case of tissue, toilet paper." And they wrote him back and told him that he would have to send, uh, he'd have to order a catalog. Have to order it out of the catalog. He wrote them back and told them that if he had the catalog, he wouldn't need the toilet paper. [laughter]² (T5)

Ordering the toilet paper in large quantity and answering the company's letter with a smart retort are typical of Mr. McIver; so, the anecdote is generally accepted as true.

The interior of Mr. McIver's home is another subject of particular interest in the area. Several persons outside the family recalled hearing that he had a barrel of money stored in his attic, and both family and non-family described the corn tacked to the railings of the steps leading from the first to the third floor of his house. One person had heard that he also had corn tacked around the canopy of his bed and another that he had an attic full of corn where he worked on his methods to improve corn production.

The Jeffersonian-like devices which he built in his house for convenience or to conserve energy also attracted attention. Among them were a high platform in his living room, where he sat in the winter to take advantage of rising warm air; a water spigot installed under the dining room table so that he could refill his glass without getting up from the table; a tall screen built to enclose a small sitting area in front of the fireplace to conserve heat; and a screened platform built outside a window onto which a bed could be rolled in summer to take advantage of the cool night air.

Mr. McIver devoted much of his time to promoting certain causes.

² I have been told by others that this is a traditional joke. I do not, however, have a printed reference.

Several narratives concern his attempts to persuade others to use his farming methods and his plans for a more healthful diet for the South. His neighbor, Earl Gandy, described how Mr. McIver used to string pods of Williamson peas, known for helping to cure pellagra, and throw them out to farmers as Earl drove him through the area. His unconventional way of giving away seed is illustrated in an incident recounted by Tug Dargan:

Grandmother was on the street in Darlington, and McIver walked up to her and said, uh, "Have you ever, uh, do you grow millet on your farm?" She said, "No, you know, I don't believe I ever have. Never have grown any millet." He said, "Well, hold out your hand. And he took out a bag and poured both hands full of millet, turned around and walked off, and left her standing there with the millet. [laughter] (T5)

To spread his ideas on nutrition, Mr. McIver printed handbills on important foods, such as spinach and turnips, giving instructions on how to grow, cook, and serve them. He also spoke out frequently for or against national and state government policy. On one occasion, he and several others wanted to speak to the State Senate about their objections to a proposed highway tax. When refused entry, the men bought a heavy timber and prepared to ram the door in, but were then allowed into the Senate chamber. His friends recall how Mr. McIver, dressed in ragged clothes, delivered a fiery speech to the senators.

Mr. McIver was regarded as odd in his own time, but many saw the worth of his ideas, and many of those once regarded as peculiar are now generally accepted. Although considered peculiar in his personal habits, he was regarded as a good publicist, and through his speeches, his journal and newspaper articles, and his pamphlets, he became known and respected throughout the South.

His chief claim to fame was his method of growing corn, stunting the young plant before allowing it to mature, which he often described by

saying, "You've got to humiliate corn first." Among his other accomplishments was the development of a long-staple cotton with heavy yield and adopted to inland climate. He got only one crop before the boll weevil arrived in South Carolina, but people in the area say that the crop was the world's record cotton crop in terms of dollars-per-acre. His name was given to a cowpea which he promoted as a cure for pellegra, even though he objected to the pea's being named for him, since he did not develop the breed.

Mr. McIver is credited also with accomplishments outside the realm of farming, although these are known only on a local level. Frank Williamson credits his uncle with building the first improved road in Darlington County and with inventing a guiding mechanism for towing cars. Lucas Dargan said that Mr. McIver started the first school lunch program in the county, which he provided at his own expense, and which consisted primarily of peanut butter, his favorite food, and crackers. Starting the Mont Clare Church was the first accomplishment named by his neighbor, Earl Gandy. Onslow Lee, who was a tenant on the Williamson farm as a boy, claimed that Mr. McIver was the first person to make ash cakes, a flat bread cooked in the ashes of an open fire. Some members of the family jokingly credit him with anticipating kleenex by carrying around a roll of toilet paper instead of a handkerchief.

Frank Williamson remarked that it is difficult to determine which accomplishments credited to his uncle are accurate. He believes that many unusual ideas are credited to him simply because he was known as an original thinker. Some persons, apparently, even credited their own ideas to him.

The problem of separating fact from fantasy in the traditions about

Mr. McIver was deplored in an article published in a local newspaper a few months after his death:

In this edition it was hoped that a complete story of the accomplishments made by the late Mr. McIver Williamson of Mont Clare would be published. Because of difficulties in obtaining correct information concerning Mr. Williamson, and his fine accomplishments for agriculture, it was not possible to publish this story.

In other words, the newspaper reporters tried to get information by interviews and got variations of folk legend as well as facts.

Although he went to great lengths to keep his gifts a secret, Mr. McIver's generosity was well known. His neighbor, Earl Gandy, said of him, "He was the best man to poor people. The poorer they was, the more he'd do for them." Descriptions of train car loads of cattle and corn sent to an orphanage in Clinton, South Carolina, and of his visits to poor families with his car loaded with vegetables are common. Leaving money on the car seats of friends and other persons in need was also frequently attributed to him.

Tradition also has it that he insisted that a gift be accepted on his own terms. For example, a man who was once a tenant on the Williamson farm, told of how Mr. McIver stood on the high step of his front porch in the afternoons and threw nickels to the children who worked and lived on his farm. If the children caught the nickels, they could keep them; if not, they had to leave them on the ground.

Another widespread belief is that he did not want to be thanked and, that he expected any instructions he issued with his gifts to be followed

³ "The Spirit of Darlington," News and Press, "Anniversary and Progress Edition," November 1940, p. 1A.

exactly. Frank Williamson tells of the time his uncle sent out the word that anyone who brought a sack out to his home would be given some Williamson peas. One man rode nine miles from Darlington to Mont Clare on horseback to get the peas, but failed to bring a sack; therefore, he received no peas.

Another characteristic of his generosity was that he helped only those whom he felt deserved it. Some anecdotes present an extreme picture of this trait:

Clara Williamson: A man came to borrow some money and thought he'd light him a cigarette as soon as he got in there. And Cousin McIver said, "I think if you're able to have money to buy matches when you could use this fire to light your cigarette, you don't need any money, to borrow any money." [laughter]

Lucas Dargan: Buy matches! [laughs]

Clara: "If you can buy matches to light your cigarette instead of lighting it by the fire," said, "you don't need any money." So that ended that man.

Lucas: "You don't need any of my money," huh? (T19)

Although the family's traditions about Mr. McIver and the image of the man portrayed generally agrees with those of non-members, there are some inconsistencies. The most obvious conflict is in the widespread belief, held by outsiders and some family members, that Mr. McIver refused to be thanked. There are several incidents told to illustrate this. One bears a resemblance to the traditional tale of the brownie who stopped helping the farmer when he was given a new suit of clothes:

Tug Dargan: Some man in Darlington was having a hard time. He was having a particularly hard time. And every morning this man, or every other morning, went out, and on the steps was a box, a bushel of groceries, things like vegetables, tomatoes, and things like — The man would, you know, kept wondering who it was,

so he stayed up, and it was, it was McIver Williamson. He saw him. And the next time he saw him on the street he said, "Thank you for bringing, giving me the vegetables." And after that he never saw him. He never had another thing from him. (T5)

There are several versions of an anecdote of which the following example is the one most commonly told by persons outside the family.

Here it is told by Onslow Lee, who lived and worked on the Williamson farm:

If he give you something and you tell him, "Thank you," he'd, uh, he'd reach back for it. [laughter] The preacher, the preacher went up there one Sunday. He give the preacher a ham. And, uh, the preacher said, "Thank you, Mr. Williamson. Thank you, Mr. Williamson." He said, "Well, give it back to me." [laughter] Preacher had to give him that ham back. [laughter] (T4)

This is perhaps the best-known anecdote about Mr. McIver. But several members of the family who were close to him or whose parents knew him well insist that he did appreciate thanks. They give another version of the ham story as the correct one:

Frank Williamson: A friend was visiting Uncle McIver, and as he was leaving, Uncle McIver took him out to his smoke house and pulled down a ham with a hook he had there. Said, "Here, I want you to have this." The man said, "Mr. Williamson, you shouldn't do that." So Uncle McIver put it back up and no more words passed. (FN1)

These family members view the anecdote as an illustration of another trait, Mr. McIver's insistence on being literal. Interestingly enough, Frank Williamson has, in recent years, heard this incident attributed to other persons.

Mr. McIver's son, McIver, Jr., insists that his father not only

appreciated thanks, he expected them. He gives an example to prove it. On a family trip to the mountains of North Carolina, the Williamsons passed a car turned over in the ditch. Mr. McIver stopped and helped the owner turn the car back over and push it back on the road. When he got back to his own car he said, "Those people didn't even thank me. They must have been Yankees." (FN2) Young McIver added that his father wanted to be thanked simply, not profusely.

As mentioned earlier, Mr. McIver's exposure to the public through his writing and his speeches was largely responsible for the spread of his ideas and farming methods. It may account also for the spread of some of the traditions about him. His ragged clothes and unconventional dress at places where he spoke on his agricultural methods are the subject of several anecdotes. One, for example, tells of how his friends suggested that he wear a tie for his speech at an agricultural meeting in Arkansas. He agreed to wear the tie, but when he came out to speak, the tie was hanging down his back.

Some of the "quotes" attributed to Mr. McIver may have become well known through his writing. His two best known "quotes" both appeared in newspaper articles. There is a significant difference between the oral and printed versions, however. The quote, "Po' land ain't good for growing nothing but po' people," appeared in a newspaper article as, "By now we should realize that it is impossible to produce anything on poor land except poor people."⁴ The quote, "If you can't plant oats in October, don't plant them," is told frequently in anecdote form. Someone asks Mr. McIver when is the best time to plant oats. He answers, "October."

⁴ McIver Williamson, "Most Needed Plant for State Inside of Hog and Cow: To the Editor of the State," The State (Columbia, S.C.), 31 December 1938, n. pag.

"When is the next best time?" "Next October." In a newspaper article Mr. McIver wrote, "If you can't plant oats in October, wait until next October."

Whether or not the articles are responsible for these quotes becoming well known is uncertain. They obviously no longer influence the tradition, but may have been the source from which the quotes were originally taken. Another explanation may be that he included in these articles some of his favorite expressions.

The attitudes toward Mr. McIver Williamson are mixed. Within the family as well as outside, he is generally admired even by those who were not fond of him personally. Many express devotion to him, but some found him intimidating and patronizing. A neighbor, Tom Cox, described his impression of the general attitude toward Mr. McIver when he said, "Everybody was crazy about him, admired him, and was scared to death of him." Most people insist that "he was a gentleman" in spite of his unconventional dress and peculiar habits, although one family member told of an exception:

Tug Dargan: We [Tug and his father] were talking about McIver earlier tonight. And just talking about that, that he was never really considered weird. He was just eccentric. And that people really liked him. And he said, "You know, I never -- he was talking about giving him such a good character reference -- "never knew of anybody that would have disliked him," and all this. He was a real gentleman. But the only time I ever heard of him as as being crude was, he was down at Harriet Swinks, you know, the McCall Place, Mrs. McCall. I don't know what her first name was.

AD: Bess McCall.

Tug: Was what?

AD: Bess McCall.

Tug: Was having him for dinner. My grandmother was down there.



Fig. 32 Joe Dargan's line and tackle.



Fig. 33 McIver Williamson's home, Mont Clare -- 1975.

Said, uh, they were having steak, and he, he couldn't, uh-- The steak was tough, but nobody ever, uh -- Wasn't bad enough for anybody to say anything about it. They were just go' go ahead and eat it and be polite. McIver didn't say a word about it either. He just reached in his pocket and pulled out his file, took his teeth out and filed them down to a sharp edge, put them back in his mouth and started eating again. [laughter] (T5)

Although most persons who knew or have heard of him believe that he was exceptionally bright and that his ideas, though unconventional, were basically sound, there are some who suggest that "he was almost too peculiar" at times. As Jolly Howard expressed it, "He had a lot of sense, but you had to have sense to know when he made sense and when he didn't."

The attitude of Tom Coxie seems to be typical of many in the area:

Tom: Lord, I could talk all day about Mr. Mac. He's a legend, that fellow.

Lucas Dargan: In his own time. [laughs]

Tom: Yes sir, absolutely. There'll never be another one like him. (FN1)

Comparison

A comparison of the traditions surrounding these three family characters, Joe Dargan, John Ervin, and McIver Williamson reveals some interesting similarities and differences. The characteristics which the three men share give some indication of the kind of person likely to be considered a character in the family. All three men were bachelors till late in their lives, and each had carried on a courtship with one woman for many years. Joe Dargan and John Ervin were known for drinking

and were supported for most of their lives by their brothers and sisters. They also were both considered a little feeble-minded. McIver Williamson, although eccentric, was not considered a pitiful character, as Joe Dargan and John Ervin might have been viewed by strangers who did not know and love them.

More important for their status as family characters, however, were their set habits and other ways of behaving which seemed peculiar or unconventional by many of the people who lived around them. John Ervin's stripping and swimming the lake every afternoon; Joe Dargan's blowing his horn instead of stopping at stop signs; and McIver Williamson's driving backwards down his lane were unconventional habits which both their family and neighbors saw repeated over and over. They were ideal material for storytelling.

There are also important differences between the three traditions. Stories about John Ervin and Joe Dargan, for example, seem to be told primarily within the family, while the traditions surrounding McIver Williamson have a wide circulation in the region; McIver Williamson stories are told as much by non-members as by members of the family.

One explanation for this difference could be that unlike the other two McIver Williamson was a public figure, both publicist and public speaker. He was often before the public in person, but his name and his ideas were also frequently presented in print. He had a wide audience for the ideas he promoted both in his speeches and his writings. His peculiar habits also were familiar to this audience. The unconventional dress he wore for his speeches and his quotable sayings became widely known. Even when his articles were sober and reflective, no doubt many of the stories about him were mentioned whenever his name appeared in print.

Horace Beck in his article, "The Making of a Popular Legendary Hero," stresses the importance of personal writing for a public audience in establishing the popular hero.⁵ Although the writings of Beck's two heroes, Davy Crockett and Ethan Allen, unlike those of McIver Williamson, were mainly autobiographical and were published with the intention of perpetuating their fame, the personal writings and public appearances of all three men and the range of the distributions of their writing to the public were significant in spreading the traditions about them.

Another explanation for the difference may lie in the personalities of the three legendary figures. McIver Williamson was a conscious showman, well aware that he was acting in an oddball fashion. He had the lordly air of many well-known eccentrics and their same self-assurance--based on a respectable income, a sure place in the community, and a respect for himself, as well as a disdain for convention. He was a smart man who acted odd. People could respect him, but they could also laugh at him too.

Joe Dargan and John Ervin were known, cherished, and protected by the family. Only their family and friends knew their good-hearted charm and had reasons to put up with them. To strangers they were helpless, shabbily-dressed old men.

McIver Williamson may have shared, even surpassed their oddity of dress and their willful acting as they pleased, but it was mixed with

⁵ Horace P. Beck, "The Making of a Popular Legendary Hero," in American Folk Legend: A Symposium, ed. Wayland D. Hand (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 129.

his interest in other people and his participation in public affairs. He was not dependant on others for financial support, but obviously was an intelligent, successful farmer/business man/public educator. Unlike Joe and John, he could afford to be generous and make gifts--no matter how oddly he did it. His combination of intelligence, ingenuity, and unconventional behavior captured the imaginations of a larger number of persons, while John Ervin and Joe Dargan were known and are remembered only in the relatively small circle of their family and friends.

There are also important differences in the strength of these traditions within the family. The humor of much of the verbal art about Joe Dargan depends on the listener's prior knowledge of Joe's characteristic traits and habits. The verbal art about John Ervin is less esoteric since few remember or have a clear picture of him. He does not survive as an individual who could be imitated.

On the other hand, many members of the family remember McIver Williamson, who was in the same generation as John Ervin, and even those who never knew him have a vivid image of what he was like. Many of the stories about him can be appreciated by persons who did not know or who have never heard anything else about him. Thus, these stories passed more easily into popular tradition.

As a result of the wide circulation of the stories about McIver Williamson, other traditions have become attached to his name. His traits and habits have often become exaggerated in the numerous retellings of these stories. The story given earlier about the case of toilet paper ordered from Sears-Roebuck is an example of a traditional story becoming part of the McIver Williamson legend. McIver Williamson's great-nephew commented

on the ease with which new traditions become part of the legend when he said, "People will believe anything you tell them about Uncle McIver."

Another result of the McIver Williamson legend becoming widespread is that stories traditionally told about him have recently been attached to other persons in the area as well. The wide circulation of the McIver Williamson stories and the nature of the variations and changes which have occurred in the tradition indicate that his legend has reached a more popular level while the traditions about Joe Dargan and John Ervin have remained largely within the family tradition.

The family has not only contributed stories to the McIver Williamson legend, they have also taken stories told by outsiders and incorporated them into the family tradition. Many family members, however, particularly those who were close to Mr. McIver or whose parents knew him well, are sceptical of some of the stories and tell only those which they feel are typical of the man as they knew him. As shown earlier, there are some contradictions between the family's image of Mr. McIver and that of outsiders. Thus, in one sense, the legend of McIver Williamson, like those of Joe Dargan and John Ervin, also exists on the level of the esoteric family tradition.

A comparison of these three family traditions has shown that the person with set habits and unconventional, peculiar ways of behaving is a likely candidate for a family "character." It has also shown some of the differences between a strong family tradition and a relatively weak one and between a private family tradition and one which has spread to the surrounding region.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to show that for members of one family network storytelling, pastimes, and family identity are inextricably bound. Any of these cannot be fully understood or appreciated without a knowledge of the others. Pastimes are organized according to family membership and provide the settings for family storytelling. Through their stories and expressions, family members are continually playing with the ways family lines are drawn, with an individual's connections to different family groups, and with images of themselves both as individuals and as a family. Family stories and pastimes, in turn, strengthen a sense of belonging to the family.

This sense of belonging arises not only from blood ties, but also from ties of friendship, from proximity, and from a shared knowledge of what family membership involves. Part of being a member of this complex family network, therefore, is knowing what it means to be an Ervin, a Dargan, a Williamson, or a Howard, to be a member of an extended family household, to be part of a community of kin. It requires knowing how to define group membership appropriately for particular situations and to know what expectations govern interaction along family lines. Membership in the family makes it important to know how to negotiate family ties without offending other relatives. It means that you must know when certain family ties can be given precedence over others.

Family membership involves a knowledge of responsibilities and

rights entailed in kinship relationships with other family members, a knowledge of the family distinctions which can be used in organizing family pastimes, and a knowledge of shared experiences and shared images of family and kin which make it possible both to tell and appreciate family stories and expressions. Moreover, it requires knowing which family distinctions are relevant to different kinds of interaction. Having a Williamson nose does not necessarily mean you will be invited to the Williamsons' Christmas dinner; and being invited to the Williamsons' Christmas dinner does not necessarily mean you will inherit their land.

This study has concentrated on family pastimes and verbal art, because it is in these forms of expressive behavior that family identity and the knowledge it involves finds its clearest, most creative expression. Family members use storytelling, in particular, to project a specific image of their group or of themselves as individuals. These images are highly self-conscious and can be manipulated for specific audiences and situations. They often involve a play not only on the family's actual self-image, but also on the image they think others have of them. In doing so they use both esoteric and exoteric ideas, for in presenting their own image they often contrast themselves to the image they have of outsiders.

The esoteric-exoteric principle also operates within the family in the stories they tell about each other. Since all members of the family in the community are related, one group's image of another also says something about their image of themselves.

Self-images are, however, only a part of family storytelling. Also

involved are a shared esthetic, shared principles of verbal performance, and shared notions of what constitutes a good performance. This does not mean that there is complete agreement on who are the expert storytellers and on which stories are best. It means that through their close association and shared identity family storytellers have learned how to please their family audiences. They can express their sense of belonging by drawing on shared knowledge and by telling stories a little differently for family members than for outsiders.

Although I have emphasized the closeness and high degree of interaction within the family, I do not mean to imply that there is not a great deal of participation in the world outside of the family. The contrast the family draws between its members and "outsiders" is usually playful; it serves more to give a shape to a particular family identity than to set up a barrier against the outside world.

The family is not a closed, but rather an open-ended group whose boundaries are negotiable, whose concepts of family have and will be continually changing. At the same time, it is a group which has a strong sense of family identity and a strong feeling for a common past, which it consciously works toward preserving.

In their emphasis on extended family ties, the family represents a contrast to the increasing trend toward isolated, nuclear families in America. Although Abrahams and Jansen have argued that the smaller and more insecure the group, the stronger the esoteric element in its folklore, for this family, this does not appear to hold true.¹ Rather, their esoteric

¹ Roger D. Abrahams, "A Rhetoric of Everyday Life: Traditional Conversational Genres," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 32 (1968), p. 59; William H. Jansen, "The Esoteric-Exoteric Factor in Folklore," in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 47.

family lore seems to arise from a feeling of security in their group identity and in their relationship with the surrounding communities. They are responding to a more mobile society by strengthening family ties and self-consciously promoting a sense of family identity in the younger generations.

In doing this study I learned an amazing amount about my own family. I hope that I have, in turn, provided a deeper understanding of one family to outside readers and that my methods and analysis may be helpful not only for what they have shown about this family but also for what they might reveal about the expressive behavior of any group of persons who share a common identity.

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APPENDIX A
FIELD NOTEBOOKS AND TAPES

FN1 December 16, 1974 -- July 10, 1975

FN2 July 10, 1975 -- January 9, 1976

FN3 January 10, 1976 -- August 13, 1977

T1 January 6, 1975. Interview with Ervin Dargan. Also present are Lucas Dargan, Ann Marie Dargan, and Tim Dargan.

T2 Same as above.

T3 January 7, 1975. Interview with Earl Gandy. Also present is Lucas Dargan.

T4 January 7, 1975. Interview with Onslow Lee. Also present is Lucas Dargan.

T5 January 7, 1975. Interview with Tug, Tim, and Carol Dargan.

T6 June 14, 1975. Interview with Ned Dargan. Also present is Cullough Dargan.

T7 Same as above.

T8 June 30, 1975. Interview with Margaret Ervin. Also present is Ida Dargan Ervin.

T9 July 29, 1975. Interview with Vannie Ervin. Also present are Margaret Mansfield Ervin and Lucas Dargan.

T10 Same as above.

T11 August 4, 1975. Interview with Vannie Ervin. Also present is Margaret Mansfield Ervin.

T12 October 19, 1975. Interview with Willie Ervin.

T13 Same as above.

T14 [1971] Interview with Hugh Ervin. Also present are Ida Dargan Ervin, Margaret Ervin, and Sarah Williamson. Recorded by Frank Williamson.

- T15 January 10, 1976. Interview with Lucas Dargan.
- T16 Same as above.
- T17 January 11, 1976. Interview with Ervin Dargan. Also present is Lucas Dargan.
- T18 January 17, 1976. Interview with Richard Howard.
- T19 January 17, 1976. Interview with Clara Williamson. Also present is Lucas Dargan.
- T20 Summer 1975. Interview with Annie Ervin.
- T21 December 25, 1968. Interview with Hugh Ervin. Also present are several members of the Ervin family. Recorded by Evander Ervin.

APPENDIX B
GENEALOGY CHARTS

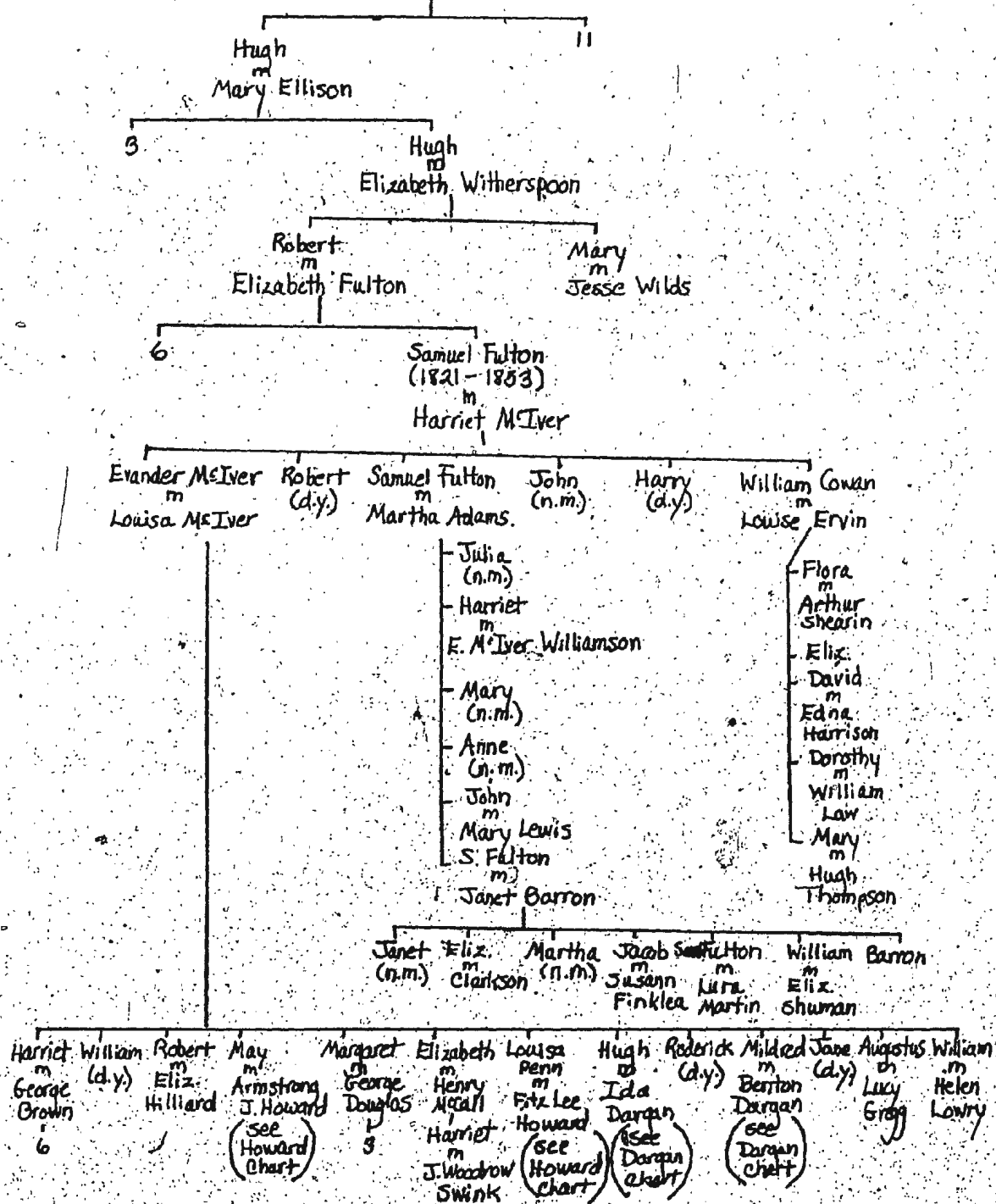
This appendix includes genealogy charts of each last-name family and a chart showing one line of common descent for all members of the family in the community. Each chart goes only as far as my parents' generation, who were born between 1900 and 1935. For each generation, I have traced the main line of descent for family members in the community, giving numbers for the remaining children. Many of those family members who live outside the community are not named even though they are included in family activities. "Never married" is abbreviated as (n.m.), and "died young" as (d.y.). In the Kolb chart a dotted line shows where a person appears twice on the chart. This chart shows some of the closest ties of kinship between family members. It does not show all of the kinship connections.

Dargan Genealogy

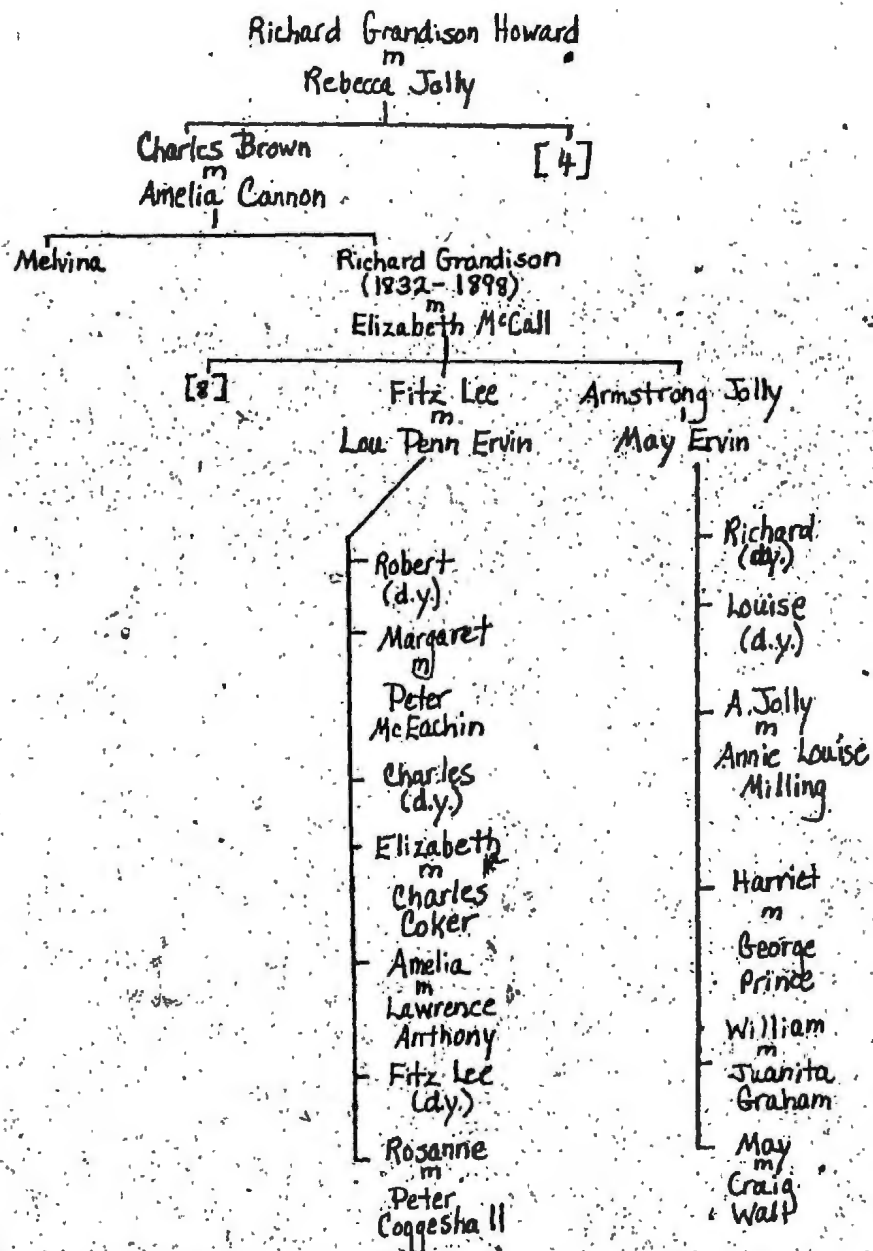
Timothy Dargan
(-1762)m
Catherine ApplebyTimothy II
(-1778)m
Ann BeasleyTimothy III
(1771-1839)m
Lydia KeithWilliam Edwin
(1811-1861)m
Sarah DuBoseWilliam Edwin II
(1844-1907)m
Mary Hart
(1846-1918)Walter
(1868-1901)
m
Ella
McCallRobert
(d.y.)Henry
(1873-1957)Edna
(1874-1925)Ella
(1877-1963)Benton
(1879-1957)Karl
(1881-1918)Ida
(1883-)Edwin
(1844-1918)Mary Hart
(d.y.)Joseph
(1893-1968)Ella
McCallElizabeth
BarnwellRoland
GandyJames
WareMildred
ErvinBlanche
PrivetteHugh
ErvinHenry (d.y.)
Elizabeth
1) Morris Baldwin
2) Claude Martin
Florence
Lucius Fishbourne
Henry
Frances Sloan
Ida
John McMasterMary
Earl Sloan
Edwin
Nina Randal
Roland
Thelma Baker
Josephine
William AllisonRobert
(d.y.)
Edwin
(d.y.)
Henry
Cele Brophy
Marion
Maner Nixon
Mary
William Vorus
Ann
D.J. BoatrightErvin
Esther
Gatfrey
Mary Hart
(d.y.)
Sarah
Frank Wilson
Mildred
Sterling
Welch
Bess
William
Barron
Edwina
Harry
Boatright
Frances
James ClarksonWalter
1) Frances Mix
2) Rose Wrigley
Joseph
(d.y.)
Hugh
Wilma
MishoeEdwin
1) M.H. Thomson
2) Mary K. McQueen
Mary Hart
(d.y.)
Margaret
(n.m.)
Evander
Margaret
Mansfield
Ida
1) Fred Cole
2) Henry JeffersEdna
John Jeffers
Louise
Samuel Spann
Virginia
Daniel CampbellMary
Hart
Rick
McIlver
Aed
Annie
McCullough
Edwards
Rosa
(d.y.)
Lucas
Frances
Edwards

Ervin Genealogy

James Ervin - came from Northern Ireland to
 Elizabeth James South Carolina in 1734.

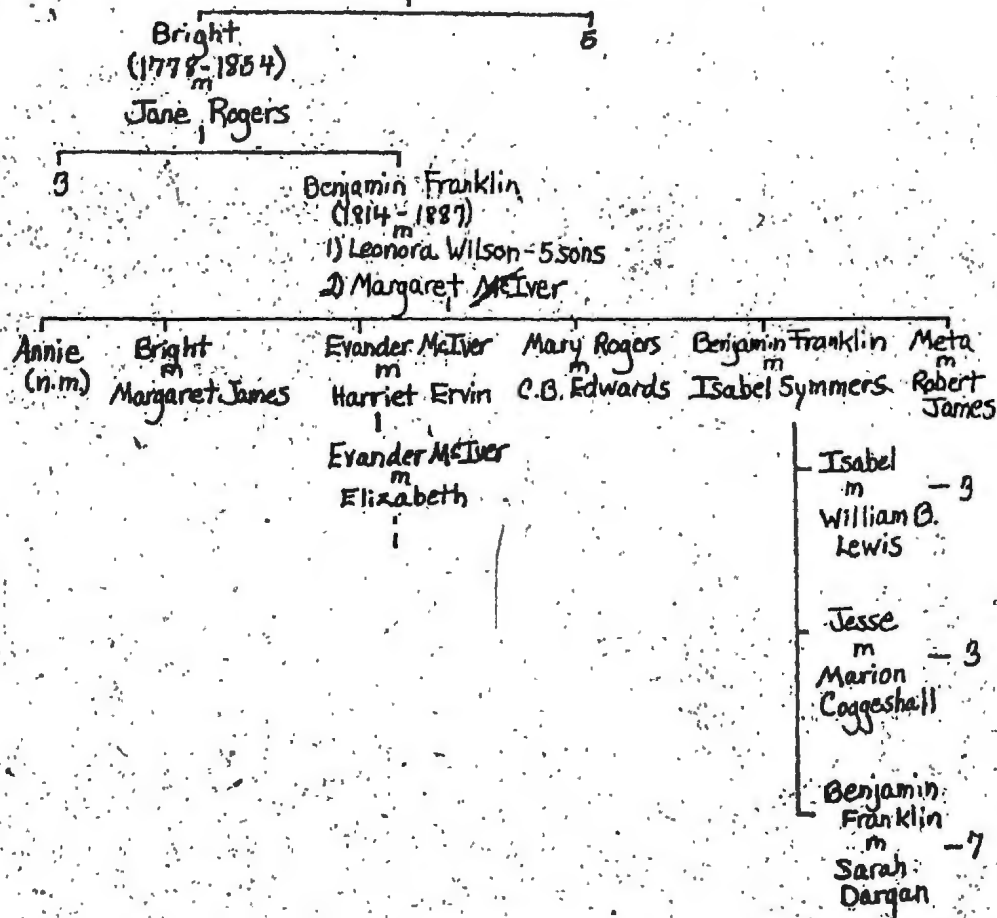


Howard Genealogy



Williamson Genealogy

Thomas Williamson m Elizabeth Hines - moved to South Carolina
from Virginia about 1750



Johannes Kolb - came to America from Mannheim, Germany, in 1702. Settled in Germantown, Pa. Came to South Carolina about 1739.
 Sarah

