



Staff photo by Allen Jernigan

The recently restored West Point Mill on the Eno River was built in 1778 and served as an important focal point for the Durham area during its 164 years of operation. Originally constructed as a grain mill, the water power was later adapted to drive a saw mill.

As the mill grew its spacious building housed an increasing variety of activities. A country store in one corner that first sold the mill's cornmeal and grits gradually brought in more foodstuffs, household necessities and even coffins and other furniture.

The mill's importance as a power and economic center facilitated its development as a social, recreational, political and geographical focus. It was a natural gathering spot for local folks and the presence of the mill influenced the location of roads in the area. Roxboro, Coal Mill and Guess Roads are all known as old mill roads.

The mill went out of business in 1942. Left to the elements, the structure collapsed in 1970. Spearheaded by the Eno River Association and the Friends of West Point, a concerted effort was mounted to rebuild the mill. Using old pictures

of the original structure to keep it realistic and, aided by funding and labor from the state and the city of Durham, the new structure was completed this year. On Sunday, the wooden and iron gears were engaged, the flood gates were opened, the water wheel began to turn and the West Point Mill was again in operation.

— John Hoke

John and Hattie Lee of Chatham County have remedies "for whatever's ailin' ya" that do not come pre-packaged and "new, improved."

In fact, John and Hattie think you cannot really improve upon nature's own. Their herbal remedies grow right in their own back yard in a cultivated garden plot and in the woods surrounding their farm in Moncure.

John and Hattie brought a sample of their herbs to the 1978 N.C. Folklife Festival in Durham and displayed them on a chart with labels and a Biblical inscription.

"In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life..." the inscription began.

"The Bible's the basis of herbal healing," John says to folks at the festival.

"...which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the trees were for the healing of the nations. Revelations 22:2."

"I believe that," John says. "The Lord made it all. That's all we have to go by."

"Herbs will cure anything that's wrong with anybody," John explains. You just have to know what to get for what ailment."

John had a little bit of every thing tacked up on his chart — samples of sasaparilla, sassafras, rat's vein, night shade, bear's foot, catnip and rabbit tobacco and life everlasting.

John has a hot (very hot) pre-breakfast appetizer that is sure to knock your socks off. Sip a little sasaparilla soaked in Georgia Moon whiskey and you have a cure for arthritis, John says. Also purifies your blood. John oughta know. He takes it everyday.

"Cut up your sasaparilla in two inch pieces. Fill a quart jar three-fourths full. Pour in your Georgia Moon," John says. "Take a tablespoon before breakfast. Repeat at bedtime."

John, who learned his herbal wisdom from his mother, picks and tends the herbs. Hattie does the fixin' and brewin'.

Hattie says the herbs were "a necessity with the family we had. I've raised eight boys and six girls. We lived out in the country and transportation was limited. We didn't have an automobile, just a mule. We couldn't afford a doctor everytime one of the children got sick."

"But my children were pretty healthy," Hattie says. "We gave most of our herbs to other people's children. For the measles, we'd brew up some herbal tea. For mumps, we'd rub some hog jowl grease on 'em."

"We'd take a little of one thing, and if it didn't work, we'd try something else. Never anyone take sick from herbs. With mint tea, you can take two or three cupfuls, won't bother you at all. Now poke root's powerful. You don't take but a little of that."

"Only thing that ever hurt me was when a doctor told me to take eight aspirins a day. You can take too much of anything."

"We don't have anything against doctors. There are times you need a doctor quick. But it makes sense to help yourself when you can," Hattie says.

A young festival goer in an orange t-shirt goes by John's herbal exhibit and is much taken in by it. Told John he had heard about an herb in China that is great for longevity.

"You take it and you'll live 250 years," he tells John who nods politely. John laughs saying, as the orange t-shirt disappears, there goes one person with some familiarity with a certain weed himself.



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For constipation, John suggests you take grip grass. "Cut off three inches of it. Boil it in a quart of water, down to two cups. Then count the steps from where you are to the bathroom, cause it clears out your system."

John's sister, Maude Bryant, gets into the herbal act, too. Maude was a lay midwife for about thirty years, learned the skills from her midwife mother. She delivered eight of John and Hattie's fourteen children and had eleven children of her own.

Maude fixed "many, many a potion" for her children, her nieces, nephews and the neighbors.

"Wild cherry and red oak bark boiled together is for whatever is your trouble," Maude says. "Boil it down to a pint. Take a teaspoon three times a day. It makes a quart after you add a pint of whiskey. The whiskey preserves it, so it won't spoil so quick."

John says to chew the root of rat's vein for heart trouble, smoke or chew rabbit tobacco for asthma, drink brewed yard mint for stomach trouble

or "to time you up right, you women."

If it's poison ivy that has you itching, John tells you to put a cupful of night shade in sweet milk, mash the leaves up. Dip a cotton rag in and rub it on.

If summer flies are buzzing your way, John proposes a solution for that.

"Mash up some catnip in a saucer. Add a little sweet milk and sugar.

When one fly gets a taste of it, he goes an' tells the others. Soon, you'll get a whole bunch of 'em eatin' it. It swells 'em up. It'll kill many a fly, I'll tell ya' that."

John and Hattie will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary next year. And you can bet herbs will be part of the celebration feast.

Georgia Moon will probably make an appearance, too.

—Patty Grebe

Arthel 'Doc' Watson brought more than just his famous banjo-picking and ballad singing to the Folklife Festival in Durham. He was accompanied by no less than eight kinfolk from the mountains of Western North Carolina.

The presence of the Watson clan added a number of mountain folkways to the festival. On the festival stage Sunday, Doc Watson played his traditional music with guitar, banjo, harmonica and song to a hot but enthusiastic crowd. Doc soon called upon Cousin Willard to give his version of the tragic Tom Dooley legend, which Doc gave with his sensitive rendering.

Cousin Willard wanted to dance, so Doc plunged into Salty Dog. Willard's feet hit the floor and the crowd joined them in exuberant accompaniment, singing and clapping wildly. The dance-crazy crowd exploded again when Willard's granddaughter, Polly Watson, started dancing unexpectedly on the stage in a style that showed without a doubt who her granddaddy was.

Up the hill in the Mountain Area, the Watson clan occupied a corner of the compound where they demonstrated mountain skills and sold examples of their handicraft. Willard leaned against a tree next to his still, puffing occasionally on a Camel through his 'smoking stick' and answering questions from curious and often moonshine-thirsty onlookers.

"There's only water in there," Willard told the ones that asked for corn whiskey. "They wouldn't let us do it up right."

"The government knows I've got this, there hasn't been a drop made in it. I made this small still up to show people how it's done. I take it with me to things like this (folk festivals) all over the place."

Willard had heard about a large bootlegging operation near Elon College that was recently raided by state and federal agents. "Them boys were making some likker," he said. Willard had had better luck in his only run-in with revenuers. "When I was a youngster, oh, about 16 or 17, I saw some agents raid a still I was working for in Tennessee. Didn't get me. I was out gathering wood, that was my job."

Willard's wife, Ora, presided over the tent where the family's handicrafts were displayed and sold. To handle the brisk business, their son, daughter-in-law and two granddaughters pitched in to help.

The most popular items were Ora's colorful quiltwork and Willard's hand carved wooden toys, especially the paddle that would set four small wooden hens to pecking for corn as soon as it was picked up. Willard prided himself on the intricately carved carriage with a team of horses that was displayed.

The Watson family exemplifies the spirit that made the 1978 Folklife Festival a success. Willard patiently explained where to put the corn mash in the still and then responded to another request by calling his granddaughter Polly to join him in an impromptu encore of his Salty Dog dance.

The crowd loved it.

—John Hoke

On-going tradition

of Danish folk emphasize individual trained artisans actors come from as Vermont and Indiana, use to home as an mountain

crafts are taught as practiced traditionally. training course, for students learn the process of producing from carding and coloring with dyes natural materials by the students likewise, students of n to make the oak are used in

ool also offers a folk music and Dance Weekends and fall.

r colleges, the Folk encourages family conducting a two-Folk School each families with children

The success of the Folk School is due in part to its unique sense of community involvement. The residents of Brasstown donated land, manpower and money to build "a school that would not just make teachers and preachers," and the school has responded by providing educational and social outlets for the community.

Through the efforts and encouragement of Mrs. Campbell, local craftsmen formed the Brasstown Carvers, whose wooden figures are now sold, along with other local products, in the school's Craft Shop, providing additional income for the community.

The day of the cottage industry is gone; twentieth century life demands a more efficient form of production. But the tenacious pride in individual craftsmanship survives, not as an outworn relic, but as a living heritage in Brasstown.

—Marcia Decker