

Migrant Workers Stop In Brunswick

By EUGENE FALLON

The sign in front of the store located a little more than a mile south of Bolivia on U. S. Highway 17 caught my eye. It read: "Migrant Workers Welcome". This was a switch, and so I pulled into the service station-grocery store to find out why.

H. J. Bryant operates the store. He is a native of Brunswick and was raised in the Supply section. Come April, and Bryant will have been at the same stand for 23 consecutive years. That's a lot of traffic, even if one uses a computer to figure on.

The sign, said Bryant, has been there for some few years now, ever since the first caravan of migrant farm workers stopped in. The initial group, figures Bryant, were lured by another sign that once spread across the front of his business building, a sign which proclaimed that here was a grill.

The business of serving sandwiches and short orders has ceased now at Bryant's place, but the migrants still stop by.

"These gypsy-workers" says Bryant, "have a certain appeal. They arouse your pity and curiosity. No one wants their business much, and yet they are

amongst the best-behaved groups which have ever stopped at my place."

According to the proprietor, the migrants move seasonally, becoming thick on the highways of Eastern North Carolina in fall and spring. What happens to them in summer, God only knows. Bryant is certain he doesn't.

They arrive in old buses, in open-body trucks, sometimes covered from wind and rain with a tarpaulin overhead. And they come in cars squeaking in last throes. Cars upon which junk-dealers look askance. If they were all adults with little behind them and less to look forward to, it wouldn't be so bad. But they pull stakes for an entire family—wives, and small children, even nursing babies. In the land of plenty they live in eternal want.

Bryant says the migrants are mostly American Negroes, with an occasional white worker. Sometimes there are Mexicans, and many Puerto Ricans of recent years.

Like locusts, they wait until harvest time and descend upon the fields stripping them of produce with prehensile fingers. And these workers are a very necessary part of American agriculture. Machines have not displaced them. It is doubtful they ever will.

Most of the migrants who make of H. J. Bryant's store a regular stop by between Long Island and Florida points. They stream southward in October and November, headed for the bean fields of Florida's Lake Okeechobee country; move into central Florida and the citrus belt later on, and head north to Aurora (N. C.) and the white potatoes in spring; winding

up in the prairie fields of Long Island, grubbing in the black soil for the tubas.

Bryant said that, when asked what they do with their summers, they shrug, saying: "Sometimes we camp at migrant shelters up north and try to live on what we have saved."

"On the whole," says Bryant, "these people are quiet and peaceful, even possessing a sort of dignity. After all, they are not beggars. They work at the only thing they can do well—harvesting in ga croon. I think it is pretty sad for them to be met with suspicion and hostility. Most business owners send them on their way. They travel pretty ragged, being very poor people, they are often travel-stained to the point of appearing dirty. That's why they get the cold-shoulder most places."

Bryant looked thoughtful. "I tell you," he said finally, "their behavior is better than their looks."

Bryant recalled a few incidents relative to his place serving as a sort of sanctuary to these unwanted tourists.

"One of the migrants who traveled in an old Buick with his family consisting of wife and four children, just made it into my place. He was on his way to Florida. His old car had a fouled-up transmission. He asked me to repair it for him and he would pick it up coming back.

"I put better than fifty dollars into that transmission. He wrote me from Florida, and even called me by phone. Finally he sent a postcard that, due to sickness in his family, he could not get his car and that I could dispose of

it in any way I could, in order to get my money back. I sold parts from it and did not lose anything on it."

They stick together pretty well," added Bryant. "When this fellow developed trouble, a truckload of migrants waited for developments. When a deal was made, the family simply transferred to the truck and off they headed for Florida."

In the fall of 1959 a stake-body truck came in towing a busload of migrants. In all, the vehicles carried 35 men, women and children. All remained on the premises for a solid week, sleeping in the bus and in the open truck. While here the men drove that truck clean down to Myrtle Beach a number of times, in order to buy junked parts there. Sometimes the secondhand parts would not fit, and they would have to make the long trip back to South Carolina, to haggle and exchange.

"That particular group," recalls Bryant, "were fresh from the potato fields of Long Island, enroute to Florida, and they came pretty well heeled. They spent about \$40 a day with me during that solid week."

The last caravan to stop at Bolivia and Bryant's place, came along in the last of November.

"I expect to see them in the spring," says Bryant, "if things run according to form."

It's a way of life. The produce, like the proverbial sheaves, must be brought in at harvest time.

Mrs. Mary Royals Dies Near Supply

Mrs. Mary Mooney Royals, 82, died Friday at her home near Supply. Final rites were held Sunday at 2 p. m. from the graveside in Chapel Hill Cemetery by the Revs. Leo Cannon and Bert Bennett.

Survivors include three sons, M. G., A. R., and E. T. Mooney, all of Supply; three daughters, Mrs. Rob Cumbee and Miss Lovie Mooney of Supply and Mrs. Roy Farrek, Houston, Tex.; 17 grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

Active pallbearers were Stanton Brown, R. E. Sellers, Jr., Hulan Royals, Bernice Hewett, Texas Hardin and Leton Clemmons.

MYF SUB-DISTRICT

A call goes out from Mrs. Grover M. Sellers, counselor for the Methodist Youth Fellowship, for a representative member, a counselor and a minister from each Methodist church in Brunswick County to participate in a Sub-District meeting to be held at Camp Church, Shalotte, January 8, beginning at 7 p. m. In con-

BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Blake of Southport announce the birth of a son, Charles Edward, at Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill on December 28.

junction with the meeting a skating party will be held at a Shalotte rink the same evening.

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