My Integrity Means More Than a Dollar Bill: Habitus and Good Farming in an Eastern North Carolina Community

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Abstract

Christopher L. Fowler. My Integrity Means More Than a Dollar Bill: Habitus and Good Farming in an Eastern North Carolina Community.
(Under the direction of Marcie Cohen Ferris, Robert Cantwell, and Charles Thompson)

This thesis addresses an agricultural community facing change and its struggle to make sense of and confront both life and work. This ethnographic project situates one farming family and their neighbors from Fountaintown, North Carolina, within and against the culture of contemporary industrial agriculture. This thesis argues that habitus shapes their work and vision.
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Methodology

This thesis is based primarily upon ethnographic work with farmers in Eastern North Carolina. The research for this project was collected over a two-year period and consists of audio-recorded interviews, video-recorded events, and photographs of the area and its people. What I was not able to collect in the field I garnered from the library. Many of the people with whom I collaborated are from Fountaintown, North Carolina. This is the place where I was reared. To a certain extent, this makes mine an emic viewpoint, albeit one that is tempered by living elsewhere for the (albeit short) whole of my adult life (Mills 2008:21). Much of the substance of this thesis comes from recorded conversations with my collaborators, some named and some unnamed, as well as my field notes and memory—both as fieldworker and as a person of this place.

This project comes to light in a roundabout way. When I began my research, I wanted to examine the place where I grew up and still call home. That place is deeply engaged in intensive livestock operations. Hogs, chickens, and turkeys are grown in metal-covered confinement facilities that dot the landscape the way that tobacco barns once did. There are, however, some small farmers that raise livestock on pasture reminiscent of the bucolic images that many Americans associate with agriculture of an earlier time. I was interested in the ways that this binary environment came to be. John Stilgoe writes “In American advertising, farming remains the small-scale, mixed-crop-and-livestock operation it was circa 1920. Its wood barns, narrow fields, and wide-porch farm houses form a background that suggests tradition, adaptability, security, and family-focused effort” (2005:3). This is not the dominant way of agriculture today, however much it may behoove certain companies to portray this fantasy as fact. The acclaimed photographer and social activist Lewis Hine claimed that “while photographs may not lie, liars may photograph” (1980: 111). I agree. Agriculture is happening in
Fountaintown, but most of it does not look like the “supermarket pastoral” images plastered on the walls of our neighborhood grocery stores (Pollan 2006: 137).

I also noticed that a disproportional number of my kin, neighbors, and acquaintances were diagnosed with many debilitating ailments. Each of my parents have been diagnosed and treated for cancer. My grandfather was recently treated for cancer. Others suffer similarly, some worse. I began to wonder if there is something about the place that we live or the way that we work that is causing us to become sick. I am not trained as scientist and do not make any claims to be. This observation, and curiosity, informs this work.

Initially my research focused on understanding the current state of American industrial agriculture and its alternatives. This work provided historical context that guided my fieldwork. The story I encountered revealed a dramatic shift in agricultural policy beginning around the middle of the twentieth century, which was first fueled by, and later propped up with America’s military-industrial complex. The shift was from small-scale family farms that produced a number of diversified crops and livestock, worked by people with generational knowledge of their land and the things it produced, to a shortsighted extractive agriculture that focused on maximizing food products. Profit was made at the expense of traditional knowledge, stewardship, and respect for the land and what was on it (Hanh, 2009:11-12, 45-48). Wendell Berry provides a useful structure for addressing these two different methods of agriculture, or this binary environment. One system is industrial, represented by the machine; the other system is “agrarian.” Norman Wirzba offers a concise description of the agrarian tradition:

Agrarianism is this compelling and coherent alternative to the modern industrial/technological/economic paradigm. It is not a throwback to a never-realized pastoral arcadia, nor is it a caricatured, Luddite-inspired refusal to face the future. It is, rather, a deliberate and intentional way of living and thinking that takes seriously the failures and successes of the past as they have been realized in our engagement with the earth and with each other. (2003:4)
The agriculture described herein borrows from Agrarianism. The people whose voices you will hear are not naïve or nostalgic, but rather, as Wirzba writes, deliberate and intentional. These are people who are thoughtful and responsible for how they live on this earth and what they leave after they are gone.

We understand—and mourn—the complex web of corporate and political power wielded by upper levels of agribusiness, and the direct consequences of these decisions on people’s lives and the land. I sought the voices of those people on the other side of food production. The impetus for this was not to demonize those in the community who practice industrial agriculture. The people of my county who are involved in intensive agriculture are decent, hardworking people. When presented with the opportunity to install intensive facilities on their properties, they did what they believed was necessary to keep their land and support their families.

I am not an apologist for the corporate forces that have colonized the rural countryside where I was raised. Berry writes that colonization has been recent history’s most dominant theme, beginning with monarchy and shifting to global corporation. He writes “it has been the same story of the gathering of an exploitive economic power into the hands of a few people who are alien to the places and the people they exploit” (2003:25). This observation echoes the words of Raymond Williams in his discussion of *The Country and the City*:

What the oil companies do, what the mining companies do, is what landlords did, what plantation owners did and do. And many have gone along with them, seeing the land and its properties as available for profitable exploitation: so clear a profit that the quite different needs of local settlement and community are overridden, often ruthlessly. (1975:292-3)

Berry and Williams both discuss exploitation of a place by outsiders, or outside capital. I agree with their conclusions. In my fieldwork I sought to understand the alternatives for agriculture in a small community in Eastern North Carolina by learning from those who have
chosen the agrarian model. This quest for alternative models was inspired by problems at the highest levels of American consumer and political culture. We waste too much energy, particularly with regard to food and oil (and those things are deeply connected). People who are conscientious of this idea, whose work endeavors to remedy our broken culture, are those I turned to for insight.

I also wanted to answer the following question: why were some people doing things differently? To answer this question we must probe Pierre Bourdieu’s idea of “habitus,” which he explains as both a “system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices,” or perhaps more precisely, as “a system of dispositions, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action. The word disposition, being more familiar, less exotic, than habitus, is important to give a more concrete intuition of what habitus is…” (1989:19; 2005:43). Simply put, I asked farmers about their work and what they thought about it. Sometimes I watched them work, other times I helped. We talked. Our conversations and their stories were grounded in experience and both collective and personal memory. Their work is guided by their love for the land, for family, and for God. These values, or dispositions, were inherited from older generations. Their ideas and actions are not set in stone or limited by bygone times, but rather are guided by precisely the system that Bourdieu describes.

The ethnographic glimpses that this work provides are informed by the work of a number of scholars and disciplines. Henry Glassie’s ethnographic prose inspires me. His work in Northern Ireland dealt with a rural, Christian community who lived close to the land in a time of violence and uncertainty (1982, 1995). My work features similar themes, although its geography is different. As for the text of this thesis, it intertwines the words of my collaborators, experts of
their own lives and experiences, with my own description and analysis. This form allows for what Glassie describes as “good work.” He writes, “we will know our work is good when we feel in it no roughness, no leaps between bogus “levels,” no gaps between the particular and the universal, the real and the abstract, no disruptive jolts as we swing from fact to theory and back” (1995:xiv). My attempt to thread together these distinct layers will hopefully achieve what Jeff Todd Titon calls a “knowing text.” This he describes as “a text skillfully crafted, particularly in terms of point of view, to establish an intersubjective relation among author, text, the “characters” (persons represented in the text), and the reader” (2003:82). I have meshed the knowledge of my collaborators, most of whom are men, with the cultural theory of Pierre Bourdieu and Barbara Myerhoff, along with the Agrarian writings of Wendell Berry and Norman Wirzba. This synthesis would not exist but for the long-suffering guidance of Dr. Marcie Cohen Ferris.
**Intent**

This is a story of people coping with change. The setting, Fountaintown, was settled by a surveyor of English descent named Joab Fountain in the 1770s. He was granted two hundred acres during the colonial period and accumulated about six hundred acres more before he died in 1800. His will indicates that he did not own slaves at the time of his death and family narratives inform me that slaves were not owned by any of Fountain’s descendants who stayed near the farm. These people were farmers, not planters. Many of his descendents have clung to their portion of Fountaint’s original settlement. For most of the period between the colonial era and now, agriculture has figured largely in the economy and culture of Eastern North Carolina. The pine trees were tapped for turpentine. When the trees gave out they were felled for fields. Joab himself kept cattle and hogs, and ran a millpond. Tobacco was grown for cash, vegetables were grown in kitchen gardens, and families kept a few chickens or livestock for meat, milk, and eggs. People stayed pretty close to home. A trip to the tobacco market in Wilson, or Lumberton, or Kinston was a significant journey. This has changed. Tobacco went on the wane and people scurried to find something to fill the financial void. Taxes had to be paid so family land could be preserved. Children had to be clothed.

Some people took jobs on the military base in Jacksonville. Others took jobs as delivery drivers in town. Some stayed on the farm full time. Many people struggled. Those that solely farmed to make a living—doing what their people had always done—were confronted by difficult choices. Chicken houses began to appear in the 1950s. People built facilities on their land and contracted with an “integrator” like Ramsey or Nash, who provided chickens and feed to the farmers to be raised on their property, and with their labor. This was a lifesaver for many, allowing them to keep their land and produce food as did their forebears. For others, it was a
tempestuous sea—fighting to swim to the surface, only to be rolled under again. One of my collaborators explained:

    Anyhow, this contract farming:
    you always need one more house.
    It looks like if you just get one more house you’ll have it made then.
    But when you get that one you’re going to need another one.¹

Hog houses came next. What did a farmer do with all the animal waste? Storage lagoons and spray diffusers were the answer.² This created new problems, which the State Legislature answered with a moratorium on hog houses in 1997. Tobacco fell further after the buyout in 2004. This was when the federal tobacco program ended and essentially deregulated the market, making the crop potentially less lucrative since the government no longer provided support. Today most people work “away.” A few farmers are doing their best to hang on in a rapidly changing environment.

In reshaping the way that food is produced and work is done, industrial agriculture has transformed Eastern North Carolina’s culture. Some of the questions this thesis addresses include: In what ways has this community’s culture changed? What happens when certain aspects of a culture are made obsolete?; How do people assert their identities in a changing cultural environment?; How do people cope with cultural transformation? I cannot provide answers, but I can provide an ethnographic lens onto the lives of a few people that are working to create order amid disorder, to adapt and preserve culture in a time of chaos. These people have much to teach us, if we listen.

¹ One of my collaborators wishes to remain unnamed. The control that the colonial agribusiness corporations have on rural communities is real. When a slave did not behave according to the plantation owner’s wishes, he might be whipped. If a farmer speaks out about Monsanto, they refuse to sell him seeds.

² This waste-management system employs the use of large pits, or cesspools, where animal waste is collected and later pumped out of the cesspools and sprayed onto fields as fertilizer.
“Change is occurring” Crandall Fountain told me, as we sat sipping coffee in the house that his grandfather built ninety-four years ago, on a piece of the land that Joab Fountain obtained all those generations ago.

It’s kind of like Fountaintown. Whether we like it or not it’s growing. What are we going to do? Are we going to make an impact on other people’s lives for Christ, or are we going to allow them to impact us? It’s a serious question we need to ask ourselves. Are we willing to do the work that Christ has called us to do? Part of that is living in a way that people can see Christ in our lives.

Crandall Fountain is a farmer and a preacher. I have known him my entire life. His house is next door to my parents’ house in Fountaintown, North Carolina. Although he is twenty-three years my senior, we both grew up on essentially the same land. The land and the connection of kinship and community, encouraged my work and provided me both with access and a kind of insider’s perspective throughout this project. Crandall is my fourth cousin. He helps my seventy-nine year old grandfather tend to the cows he keeps on roughly forty acres adjacent to Crandall’s farm. He is neighbor, family, friend, and teacher. His voice, along with his father Edward Fountain’s, features prominently in my thesis. Other voices belong to Crandall’s neighbors, mine among them.

I make no claim that my ethnographic representation of Crandall and his neighbors is representative of this community. Noyes writes “That groups are not homogeneous is the first realization of any scholar doing fieldwork” (Noyes 2003, 13). Nor do I pretend that this brief account is representative of them as people in any whole sense—to do so would wrong. I hope this work honors those who were both kind and patient to me, who talked to me, and became my teachers. My narrative begins with the context of a brief of history, and then examines how this community’s culture is performed today. I analyze this evolving creative process and discuss its function (Dundes 1964:255-6).
Hogs

The only Business here is raising of Hogs, which is manag’d with the least Trouble, and affords the Diet they are most fond of; The Truth of it is the Inhabitants of N Carolina devour so much Swine’s flesh, that it fills them full of gross Humours.

William Byrd II (1987:54)

There are a number of ways to examine the transformation of culture and agriculture in eastern North Carolina in general, and Fountaintown in particular, but hogs provide perhaps one of the most accessible lenses through which to view change. Hogs have been an important part of eastern North Carolina’s culture since the sixteenth century. Christopher Columbus had swine among his stock when he visited the Caribbean for the second time in 1493 (Anderson 2004:97). Pigs proliferated, colonizing and pilfering in the image of their European importers. In the spring of 1539, Hernando de Soto shipped three hundred pigs to Charlotte Harbor, Florida, before marching many of them to present day North Carolina (Wise 2009:201). Those that escaped the company of the Spanish thrived in the piney forests of North Carolina and beyond. Charles Reagan Wilson writes, “By the time English settlers came to Virginia in 1607 with their own domesticated pigs, wild hogs were roaming the countryside” (2006:88).

In A New Voyage to Carolina, the explorer and natural historian John Lawson writes “The Pork exceeds any in Europe; the great Diversity and Goodness of the Acorns and Nuts which the Woods afford, making that Flesh of an excellent Taste, and produces great Quantities; so that Carolina (if not the chief) is not inferior, in this one Commodity, to any Colony in the hands of the English” (1967:88). Here, Lawson references the bountiful nutrition that hogs found in the forest. This was during a time when hogs were not confined by fences, but rather were free to root and roam and feed themselves (1993:236). Hogs were notched, or ear marked, to indicate who they belonged to, and this was common practice in Fountaintown well into the nineteenth century. Joab Fountain’s will indicates that he had swine marked in such a way (Fountain
When the Virginia statesmen, William Byrd, visited Northern North Carolina nearly twenty years after Lawson, he wrote that:

The Truth of it is, these People live so much upon Swine's flesh, that it don’t only encline them to the Yaws, & consequently the downfall of their noses, but makes them likewise extremely hoggish in their Temper, & many of them seem to Grunt rather than Speak in their ordinary conversation (1987:55).

Although Byrd’s comments are flippant, they do illuminate the predominance of pork in the early Eastern North Carolinians diet.

Small-scale pig production continued well into the twentieth century. North Carolinian Randall Kenan writes, earlier during his lifetime:

Most of the pork consumed by North Carolinians was raised and butchered locally by individual farmers, like my cousin Norman, long after Carl Sandburg declared Chicago ‘Hog Butcher to the World,’ long after the invention of refrigerated trucks and train cars. The identity of most North Carolinians was bound up in the homegrown hog…Pork products of all types came to form a solid core at the center of Southern culture: hams and bacon and sausages and loins, not to mention chitlins and pig feet and neckbones, as well as lard and headcheese, which takes a true connoisseur to appreciate. In North Carolina, passion for pork is a birthright. Smokehouses were ubiquitous, dotting the rural landscape along with the tobacco barns and cotton fields (2008:343).

The concept of identity and the homegrown hog is important in eastern North Carolina. For this particular article it suited the author’s theme, but the idea is not developed as fully as it might be. The identity of individuals in Kenan’s community, located only a few miles away from my own, was tied to the land that they stood on, where their food grew, where they worked, and where their ancestors lived and were buried. Kenan’s kin are African-American. Mine are Caucasian. I am referring to a kind of identity that goes beyond race. Their identities were tied to their place and habitus. This all began to change in the second half of the twentieth century when industrial-farming practices entered the world of hog production and drastically changed the food economy. Nicolette Hahn Niman writes, “Perhaps more than any other force, industrial hog and poultry production have molded North Carolina’s recent history” (2009:11). Tractors,
and the addition non-organic inputs (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides), along with the post-WWII push from rural farms to urban centers, made small-scale hog husbandry obsolete (Thompson 2002:55; Bass 1995: 309). There was also a massive shift of scale in agriculture on the national level. Secretary of the USDA under Nixon, Earl Butz, advised farmers to “get big or get out.” He was referring both to crops, which he recommended to plant “from fence row to fence row,” and to intensive livestock operations (Pollan 2006, 52). Hog farming was no exception.

From 1983 to 1995 alone more than 16,000 hog farmers left the business in North Carolina (Warrick and Stith 1995). Warrick and Stith, from Raleigh’s News and Observer, blame the corporate hog farming industry for forcing out many independent growers. Jeremiah Jones, a hog farmer who lives near Fountaintown, told me this happened to his uncle, Keith Lanier. He explained “contract farming came through and put him out of business in ’94, ’95” (Jones 2011). The process of contract farming replacing small, independent farms developed over the course of several decades. Historian Matthew Thompson explains that the shift began in a noticeable way in 1965 (2000:578). The Agricultural Extension Service promoted commercial pig production as a more favorable alternative to raising hogs for mere subsistence. In the same year the Swine Development Center was created in Nash County, near Rocky Mount. This marked a change in priorities on the state level from row-crop agriculture to livestock production.

The proliferation of the corporate, vertically-integrated hog-farming system is credited largely to politician and businessman Wendell Murphy, a native of Duplin County, North Carolina. In Murphy’s home county alone, their 2007 Agricultural Statistics reported 2.4 million hogs—that’s a human to hog ratio of about 1:48. After graduating from North Carolina State University, Murphy became a vocational-agriculture instructor at Rose Hill High School. He began conventionally raising hogs as a kind of side job (Warrick and Stith 1995). Eventually, he
contracted the care of his hogs to other farmers. A cholera outbreak forced Murphy to euthanize his stock and quarantine his farm (Thompson 2000:581). Murphy had so much excess grain to move that it was imperative that he feed it to pigs, regardless of whose property they temporarily resided. Murphy found this contract method efficient and profitable. He explored how he might expand his production even further. Scully writes:

> Inspired by the poultry industry, which today can pack as many as a quarter million birds into a single building, he realized that with just a bit more ingenuity hog farmers could also eliminate the space, labor, and cost of raising pigs in open lots. He saw the possibility of barring their movements entirely—saving money on feed since confined pigs burn off less energy and require fewer calories than free-range pigs, deploying vaccines and antibiotics to control the diseases borne of mass confinement, and, five millennia after the first pig was domesticated, solving the problem that the animals are, well, animate. The crucial breakthrough came in the early 1960s when he conceived of how, by the simple device of slatted floors, their refuse could be collected underneath a climate-controlled confinement facility, flushed through a drainage channel, mixed with chemicals, and then sprayed onto the soil or carried off—somewhere—by the winds (2002:248).

> These confinement facilities house hundreds of animals in limited spaces. This, of course, produces unfathomable quantities of waste each year. The excreta from these facilities are usually collected into giant cesspools, which are known as lagoons. These open-air cesspools are essentially unsealed pits. The excess from the cesspools is periodically sprayed onto fields as fertilizer. This system of production and its disposal of waste is a sensitive topic that has received much scrutiny in recent years. Many people complain about the smell. Others say that it smells like money. The smell, however, is not the only thing that causes controversy—the impacts of lagoons and spraying on the land are alarming. A study conducted by an international team of researchers and led by a scientist from NC State, concluded that industrial hog lagoons released startling amounts of atmospheric ammonia that may lead to respiratory disease, nitrate contamination of drinking water, eutrophication climatic changes, and nitrogen saturated soils (Aneja 2001: 1905-6).
In 1995, a lagoon at the Ocean View hog operation in nearby Onslow County burst and sent twenty-five million gallons of sewage into the New River. The result of this ecological nightmare was the death of ten million fish, and the closure of 364,000 acres of coastal wetlands used for shell fishing (Wise 2009:77). In the Neuse River, north of Fountaintown, intensive agriculture is the largest contaminator, including both factory farming and intensive monocropping. A scientist from North Carolina State University, Dr. Joann Burkholder, blames industrial animal operations for the dramatic rise in ammonia in the Neuse River estuary as well as the fish killing disease *Pfiesteria* (Niman 2009:21).

Not only are these toxic compounds harmful for local fish populations and the other flora and fauna in Eastern North Carolina’s ecology, but there are also serious concerns for the people who live near factory farms. The Natural Resources Defense Council reports that after testing some 1,600 wells located near factory farms, thirty-four percent showed nitrate contamination (Marks 2001: 37).

This paradigm shift, from small, diversified farms to the integrated, the consolidated, the massive-scale operations, which Butz recommended and Murphy helped to develop in the swine industry, also changed the way that people ate. When many small farmers kept at least a few hogs they harvested and processed their own pork. Hog killing events were held at the start of winter and Duplin County farmhouses were outfitted with a smokehouse, where hams and bacon were cured and lard was stored. Industrial agriculture and cheap supermarket meat made these processes obsolete. In his novel, *A Visitation of Spirits*, Randall Kenan writes:

Of course it’s a way of life that has evaporated. You’d be hard-pressed to find a hogpen these days, let alone a hog. No, folk nowadays go to the A&P for their sausages, to the Winn Dixie for their liver pudding, to the Food Lion for their cured ham (1989:9-10).
The author goes on to lament the disappearance of offal on supermarket shelves. Pickled pig’s feet and chitlins are perhaps not the most popular cuts of meat at most supermarkets today, but were considered special treats when farmers processed their own animals. Families would not consider wasting any part of the pig. Consequently some of the pork products that were central to regional foodways, and thus its practice and identity, disappeared with the old methods of raising pigs.
Fountaintown: Reflections

The land is mostly flat. Its sandy soil drains into the various creeks and swamps like veins on an old woman’s hands. Where they have not been cleared for new construction or row crops, long-straw pines line the sides of the road. Driving the straight stretch of the only highway that passes through this small town, NC Highway 111, one comes to a crossroad. The remains of an old concrete store sit at the northeast corner. A kerosene pump rusts just under the eave of Fountain Brothers Hardware. Years ago, before this store closed, I spent summer afternoons here with my granddaddy, Elton. He had a bottle Coca-Cola and a Nab. Typically, I got what my granddaddy had, but sometimes opted for a chocolate Yoo-Hoo. During the hottest part of the day in Duplin County, near four o’clock, this was the place where older men gathered to talk. Between the service counter and the front window were a few tables and an assortment of chairs. Because I could only sit still long enough to finish my snack, I remember snatches of the conversation. One man spoke about how he never drank cold beverages while he was working outside in the heat, because it made him feel ill. He came in the house and had a cup of coffee and cooled off before he touched a glass of iced water or sweet tea. The others nodded and rumbled “mm-hmm” to affirm the speaker before moving to the next topic. The split-level store was full of wonderful things for my young eyes to behold—lengths of chain and rope, hoop cheese under a big glass dome, a display case almost full of Old Hickory knives. I spent hours exploring the store’s dim corners. Long before my time, two stores and Joab’s small mill for grinding corn stood near the crossroads. This was once the center of economic activity for the community of mostly subsistence farmers.³

³ I say here that this was a community of mostly subsistence farmers because tobacco was a cash crop, and there were a few who had other professions.
Heading south from the store, down Fountaintown Road, on the left side is a cemetery. The red letters on the sign read “HOSEA FOUNTAIN CEMETERY.” My granddaddy’s father, Raleigh Nelson Fountain, is buried here. Raleigh’s older brother, Oliver Dixon Fountain, is buried just beside him. Looking over the field from their graves, John Bryan’s pecan tree dominates the view towards the road where I grew up, and where my people lived and died. It’s called Oliver Fountain Road. Barbara Allen describes the rural countryside in the South as a genealogical landscape. She contends that the land becomes a symbolic landscape, bound up in individual and collective memory of ancestors and their interactions (Allen 1990, 152). While I am not convinced that this phenomenon is unique to the South, it is absolutely at work here. I experienced this the summer I returned home from my first year at college.

I was helping granddaddy dig fence post holes in his cow pasture. It seems like it had been an uncharacteristically dry spring, because the ground was harder than usual. The weathered post-hole diggers looked as though they had seen better days. Jokingly, I asked granddaddy where he got those old things. He responded plainly: They were daddy’s. Things felt serious all of a sudden. The instrument in my hands became a symbol, as did the land where I stood. I instantly felt connected to that piece of ground in a new way. This was work as a kind of ritual. Myerhoff writes that “Action is indicated because rituals persuade the body first; behaviors precede emotions in the participants. Rituals are conspicuously physiological” (Myerhoff 1977, 199). This work, alongside my grandfather, using tools passed down in the family, tied me to this place in the same way that Oliver’s descendents are tied to this place.

Much has changed on this short lane in the last century. Nine houses were built. Barns were moved and torn down. Fields were sown with corn and soybeans and tobacco. Pasture and wood were fenced to feed cows and hogs. Time passed, seasons ran their courses, and people worked. In the first part of the twentieth century, most people worked closer to home than they
do today. The land was cultivated and provided food for peoples' tables. What was not grown at home was bought and paid for with money from tobacco grown, harvested, hung, cured, and carried to market from the farm.

**Edward Fountain**

On a sunny March afternoon, I sat with Edward Fountain in the house that his father Oliver built, the house where Edward was born. As we talked he explained what work was like when he was growing up on his father Oliver’s farm. There was always work to be done. Even before Edward was old enough to work a mule or crop tobacco, his father kept him busy. This was the case from the time that Edward was a small child.

I was the baby of the crowd. I was the one they said was spoiled.
But that was not right [laughter].
Daddy used to, when I was small, and right on,
he could find the most roots
to pick up of any place I had ever seen in my life,
for a place that had been cleared for as long as it had been cleared.
But there were always roots to pick up.

I know one time I was a’telling him—
he was getting onto me pretty tight—
and I told him I couldn’t see them.
And he said if he had a good whip,
that’s all the glasses you’d need,
and then you could see them! Ha!
But I can look back and just think of the joy
that I had of growing up here as a young boy
and growing into adulthood.

Edward remembers work completed at a human pace. Even after mechanization, primarily tractors, changed the face of agriculture in this area, Oliver preferred to do things by hand.

Daddy was not much on tractors.
He liked to work a mule.
As a young boy I thought that was so foolish.
I’d have to take the mule and every year,
when he had his corn they’d lay the corn by,
he would scatter the soda or the nitrogen by hand
and I was coming along with him behind him
with the mule and plow and plow up the middles.
But that was his way of doing it, that was the way he wanted it done.
He just loved to work a mule.
I reckon until he was probably around 80
he continued to plow the mule in the garden.
He just enjoyed it.
I couldn’t ever get the mule to do like I wanted it to
and she had a mind of her own.
He could take her and walk her just wherever he wanted her to walk
and he could do it.

Clearly, Oliver had none of the contempt for work that plagues contemporary American culture
(Berry 1996:12). Tobacco was good money for people who were not afraid to work. The crop
allowed Oliver to provide for his family and to help his neighbors when he could. Tobacco was
a way of life for the Fountain family.

Tobacco was really the only money crop that we had back then.
That was the money crop for daddy.
Of course, us young boys, we worked in the community
with different farmers, that was what little bit of money
that we could have, you know, our few jingles in our pocket
would be from where we would help somebody else in tobacco.
I’d make, in the summer, about two hundred dollars;
it’d carry me through the next school year.

A bed was made to sow the tobacco seeds. After the seeds sprouted, the small plants were pulled
from the bed in the morning and set out in the field during the afternoon with a transplanter.
The hills of tobacco would need to be tilled to keep the weeds down and pesticides were applied
to kill worms. The plants blossomed when there were about waist high. The top was cut out of
the plant so the leaves would grow larger and heavier. Suckers grew between each of the plants
leaves and were removed on a weekly basis. Finally, leaves were cropped. It was hard, heavy,
dirty work. Sticky tobacco sap covered hands and arms. Sand covered everything.

We did everything by hand.
We’d do the cropping, you know,
and put it in an old horse drawn drag
that went along right beside us.
Or, in the later years, we would have a trailer behind the tractor that would
leave every fifth middle out. It would be driven by a young boy
and stay right along with us.
In the beginning we had a mule that would pull
the drag right down the middle with us.

After the tobacco was cropped and loaded, it was hung in barns and cured. This was a time
sensitive job that required many hands. Neighbors helped prepare the tobacco for the barns
while it was fresh.

They’d put three leaves in if they were big leaves,
and then the lady would loop it on the stick.
It was quite a process.
Then it was hung in the tobacco barn.
That was a real hot job.
I can remember daddy had two barns.
He had one that had a wood furnace in it and
another one that had kerosene burners in it.
I just do remember that him and my two older brothers, they would cut the
wood for the one, but I only remember them using it for a couple of years and
then it was all converted to the kerosene burners.

Edward told me how hot it was inside those barns. He preferred to work at the top of the
corn—even with the heat—because it seemed like less work, hanging the tobacco that had been
tied to the sticks, rather than working at the bottom where they had to hang it and hand it up.

The only bad part about being at the top was that
you had to hang it and keep it just exactly the
right distance as you come down and that
first cropping that you got what we call sand lugs.
You’d be so sandy you felt like you’d wallowed in the sand.
In the morning it’d always be wet, gritty.
It was a dirty job but I enjoyed it. I can look back now and think what a good
time I had, and the other young boys.

Edward enjoyed the chance to get together with his extended family and neighbors. It was
always a collective process. They called it “swapping help.” This ethic of neighbors helping
neighbors grounded people in their community, created the kind of communitas that Victor
Turner described as “people connecting to other people on a purely human level” (Turner 1979,
471). Granted, this entire system existed because of the government’s supportive role in the
tobacco economy. Without their support this structure would not have existed. What is interesting is the way that people behaved and related to one another within this structuring structure.

Daddy would take us, and we’d go help Orville and then he and his wife would come and help us on our day.
And different people:
Uncle Raleigh we did the same way.
I worked in it a many a day.

After the tobacco was put up and cured it would be ready to go to the market. This trip, which only occurred a few times each year, was a treat for Edward. His father, Oliver, preferred to take his tobacco to the market in Wilson, two counties north of home. He believed he got the best price there. He sold his crop at Watson Warehouse for a time and later switched to Clark Warehouse, also in Wilson.

We were in school then, but I would always look forward to once a year during tobacco selling.
He would let me go with him when he’d go to sell tobacco.
You’d stay overnight. He had an old red pick-up, that old ‘47 Chevrolet.
At night we’d sleep right in the warehouse and he’d put a bunk in the back of the truck and we’d sleep right there.
I’ve heard daddy snore loud enough you could hear him for two city blocks.

The tobacco buyers would come buy it midmorning, with the auctioneers, also.
Have you ever heard them selling tobacco?
That was a treat.
The auctioneer was walking right down between there, and the buyers would be about sometimes eight or ten buyers that’d be walking along there with him, and of course there was a man following them that could pick up the buyers names by voice.
And he’d write on their ticket who bought it and how much a pound. After you put it on that basket, then it was weighed.

We carried as much as we could possibly get on the truck, or as much as we had ready.
Sometimes you might have eight or ten piles or eight or ten baskets, sometimes you had two or three, but you always wanted to carry as much as you possibly could.
I expect we’d make 8 or 10 trips during the tobacco selling.
That was the longest trip I'd ever been on, from here to Wilson.

We always went to Godwin’s Restaurant to eat lunch or dinner or whatever. Daddy loved their barbecue better than anything I’d ever seen him eat. They're still known for good barbecue up in that area.

Going to the tobacco market was a treat for Edward. Of course, eating out in town after the tobacco sale was a special celebratory meal for Edward and his father. He explained to me that most of what they ate daily was raised and cooked on the farm. Pork was a regular feature on his mother Margie’s table. Edward’s description of a typical breakfast mirrors that of his neighbors.

For breakfast we would have some type of pork:
mostly country ham.
We’d have biscuits,
of course sometimes eggs or grits or rice:
I reckon that’s why I love rice so good today.
That’s what we’d have.
Very seldom would we ever have cereal or cornflakes or anything like that.
It was either grits or rice
but we always had eggs
and ham and homemade biscuits.
Everyday of my life when I was going to school that was there.
Of course I didn’t always want it but I didn’t realize how good them biscuits were ‘til I couldn’t get one.

Biscuit flour was one food stuff that the family did not produce itself. White flour was paid for with cash from the tobacco sale. The lard and milk that Margie folded into that flour, however, was made at home. Similarly, the mid-day meal, dinner, was largely comprised of things grown on the farm.

For lunch a lot of times, that was mama’s duty, to feed everybody, she'd have either turnips, or collards, and we’d have again some boiled or baked pork and occasionally we might have some beef but not very often, it was mostly pork that she’d get out of the smoke house.
She canned a lot of string beans in the summertime and corn. She’d have string beans and corn and sometimes we’d have rice at dinner, sweet potatoes.
Daddy loved his sweet potatoes as good as anybody.
And at night we’d have vegetables
and again we’d have pork or something like that.
We always had meat and vegetables, and he always had plenty of
potatoes, sweet potatoes, collards, turnips, mustard—
because he grew it himself.

He grew everything!
Daddy had a thumb that he could make anything grow.

The same was true of the meat that the family ate, especially the pork that Edward spoke
of earlier. The hogs that Oliver raised were harvested and butchered right there on the
land by the house. When we talked about the hog killings that were held on Oliver’s
farm in the past, I heard echoes of similar rituals that others in the community had
shared with me.

Daddy would always kill four or five hogs.
He would cut the shoulders out,
and the hams, and the sides, and they’d go in the smokehouse and cure them.
Of course the backbones were our fresh. And just about everybody did.

After that we carried them off to have them dressed.
I carried one or two. But we don’t even do that anymore.
We go to Piggly Wiggly now. That was a treat too, having a hog killing.
Everybody in the community coming to help, and all that good food at lunch
time. Mama would stay in the kitchen, her and two or three of the ladies and
have everything cooked. I ate way too much.

The Hog Killing Event

I attended a hog killing near Fountaintown in the winter of 2010 at the home of Rhonda
and Rupert Bryan. The event is relevant to the current discussion as a window onto the world
that Edward describes above, as well as an example of how individuals in this community cope
with changes to their work, food, and culture. It was a powerful ceremony. It began as the sun
peeked over the tops of the long leaf pines.

A shot rings out beside the shed: the first hog drops flat on its stomach. A man runs a
knife through the animal’s neck. Four more shots follow. Back at the house Rhonda and her
sister prepare for the work that will take place later in the day. The scalding vat is already hot, gray smoke and white steam rising. Each pig’s body is submerged in the one hundred forty degree water. After the dip, the carcass is placed on a bed of pine straw before the scraping begins. Scrapers, handles with sharp discs on either side, shave the white hair off the hogs’ hides; the men are on all fours working frantically. Tufts of white hair rest on the damp pine needles beside the pit. The bodies, now unblemished, are hung on the gallows by the Achilles tendons. A line is cut from the pigs’ noses down to their tails; their insides fall to the washtub below. Livers and hearts are picked for pudding. The women surgically remove polyps and mince the smooth organs.

Meanwhile, what’s left of each carcass is laid across a long wooden table under the barn where the men discuss how each pig will be further disassembled. After the head is removed, the sides are cut with both saw and hatchet until square slabs of raw bacon are set aside, before they are taken into the smokehouse. Everything, excepting lean cuts is flung into one of the five-gallon buckets that sits atop the table. At mid-day there is a break for dinner. Rhonda prepared an enormous spread, counters were piled with ham, greens, beans, stew and cakes. Everyone who came to help ate well, but they were soon back to work. Shoulders and hams rest as the bucket is moved to the women’s table. The women cut the milk-white fat into strips and separate it from what will become sausage. The sausage is ground with a table-mounted meat grinder and spiced with red pepper and salt.

Later, cast-iron cauldrons, the size large wheelbarrows, are heated. Mounds of fat are dumped into the pots and slowly rendered over a low-burning wood fire. A hand-carved, fifty-year-old wooden paddle stirs until the mass melts. The contents of each vessel are poured through the lard press and strained oil runs through the spigot into an aluminum stand. They ate hot, crispy cracklins while the lard cools.
This event is communal. Family members and neighbors come together to share in the work and fellowship. It was a chance to reconnect with one another and the past. Of the three generations present at these proceedings, the eldest among them recalled when a hog killing marked the changing of the seasons, a time when fields were mostly fallow. The Bryans explained that this hog killing was not performed out of necessity, as they used to be. Most of the meat they buy comes from the grocery store. They had the recent hog killing was because they want to pass this heritage to the younger generations in their family. They want to give pieces of their heritage, pieces of their identities to their children.

Moore and Myerhoff highlight five ways of examining the outcome of secular ritual, like the Bryan’s hog killing. They outline them in the following: explicit purpose, explicit symbols and messages, implicit statements, social relationships affected, and culture versus chaos. These are useful concepts to examine the hog killing, but the most interesting is the last: culture versus chaos. They write “all collective ceremony can be interpreted as a cultural statement about cultural order as against a cultural void…Through form and formality it celebrates man-made meaning, the culturally determinate, the regulated, the named, and the explained…Every ceremony is par excellence a dramatic statement against indeterminancy in some field of human affairs” (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:16-7). This is precisely the function that this hog killing event serves in Fountaintown now. The community reaches back to older forms and expressions—particularly food rituals—in an increasingly chaotic world. The agriculture of this place has changed dramatically in the last fifty years, the economy (nationally and locally) is depressed, and the food that these people eat comes to them through a convoluted system that is to a great extent hidden. Uncertainty abounds. The Bryans perform this ritual to remind themselves and their children that they know how to feed themselves from the land, a habitus that their forebears furnished them. They are carving certainty from caprice.


Fountaintown: Possibilities

The American food system has undergone a radical transformation since Oliver Fountain built his house in 1917. Recently, there has been much discussion of the current state of agriculture. Michael Pollan and Wendell Berry argue that the agribusiness economy is subsidized by the Federal government and propped up by cheap oil. Corporations colonize rural landscapes. Corporate agribusiness degrades rural economies and ecologies. From this dim perspective, the work of the eastern North Carolina farmers described herein shines brilliantly. I am most interested in what Wendell Berry describes as a “healthy farm culture” which I believe is possible in Fountaintown (1996:42-3. Emphasis original). Berry argues that this sort of culture:

- can be based only upon familiarity and can grow only among a people soundly established upon the land; it nourishes and safeguards a human intelligence of the earth that no amount of technology can satisfactorily replace. The growth of such a culture was once a strong possibility in the farm communities of this country. We now have only the sad remnants of those communities.

This farm culture requires generations of knowledge, patience, and care. Furthermore, Berry’s vision requires conscientious stewardship based on moral vision. Oliver’s grandson, Crandall Fountain, has accrued this generational knowledge and continues to reach for this vision.

When adulthood came for Edward he left the farm. He told me “I don’t understand how daddy could survive raising six children on this little farm here, and save money.” Oliver made it work, somehow. However, the acreage and Oliver’s old system of farming would not support two families. After Edward finished high school at Chinquapin School he went away to Atlanta to study business. He eventually got a job on the nearby military base when he came back home to live.

I knew that this would be mine some day, but when I was getting out of high school, he told me, “Now, the little farm’s not big enough for two of us.”
And that’s all he ever said. He didn’t tell me I had to go get a job or nothing, he just said “it’s not big enough for two of us.”

Even while most of Edward’s career was spent working away from home, he still maintained an impressive peach orchard and kept some livestock next door to his father’s place.

I still piddled around here. When Crandall was a little fellow I always made sure he had a sow or two so he could have a few dollars that he could call his own. He always had a few hogs… I reckon that’s the reason he went to State. He was good with them, with the animals.

Edward’s son Crandall came by it honestly. He grew up around agriculture and lived in a community that was based upon this way of life. This disposition, this habitus, that shaped Oliver and Edward’s lives, also forms Crandall’s life.

**Crandall Fountain**

Son of Edward and grandson of Oliver Fountain. Crandall grew up next door to his grandfather’s farm where he learned how to care for crops and livestock. He graduated from North Carolina State University in 1984 where he studied animal and crop science. When he finished his studies in Raleigh, Crandall came home to farm. He has seen many changes in agriculture in his forty seven years.

A young man used to could have a few acres of tobacco, your granddaddy could testify to that, and could grow a few acres of tobacco and raise a few hogs and cattle and he could live on the farm. I can’t do that.

His farming practices are certainly different, technically, from that of his grandfather’s, but they are in the same “structure of perception,” they preserve the same goals and seek the same ends (Bourdieu 2005, 43).

Crandall began raising hogs independently—with no contract with a vertical integrator—in the 1980s. He had a small building for farrowing pigs, raising them from birth up to forty-five pounds. He put them out on pasture and fed them until they reached marketable weight. Like
other farmers in the area, he eventually faced with the choice of becoming a contract farmer. He started growing hogs with Carrolls and eventually moved to Coharie. Of the later company, which recently filed Chapter 11, Crandall said that they were among the best companies with which he worked. Although they were a part of the agribusiness “integrated” model that Berry laments, Crandall explained that their small size allowed them to frequently interact with individual farmers.

The owners were good home people, local people. So they had a concern for people in the community. It wasn’t a corporate—and I’m not trying to knock them—but whenever you have a man that’s from the area, he’s got to deal with people and live with people. I think he’s going to have a different response from someone having to deal with a board of directors that’s traded on Wall Street.

The company’s representatives were people from the community. There were held accountable by others in the community. This gave farmers more input. Crandall thinks that that was a good thing for the farmers and the animals. When he agreed to collaborate with me on this project, he made it clear that he was not interested in criticizing the corporate outfits.

The integrator is not all bad. It’s allowed some family farmers to stay in business where they would not have been able to stay in business. They wouldn’t have been able to stay on the farm. I also see where places like Magnolia, Rose Hill were drying up. Dilapidated buildings that hadn’t been painted, there just wasn’t any money. Where now, I see new buildings, new paint, new businesses. I see people driving new vehicles. So there’s been an influx of income, but at what cost?

This impulse, not to attack, but to nurture, is connected to Crandall’s moral values. He is more interested in lifting his neighbors up rather than passing judgment.

True love offers a way to come to each other and not tear down, but offer corrective criticism…
I think we have to be careful.
I think there’s room for both of us, and we also have to keep the
big picture in mind as far as having the potential to feed the world.
I don’t like the idea of tearing each other down.
There’s room for both of us.

When I asked Crandall why he transitioned away from contract farming he explained that the decision was part of his spiritual growth. He looks back to the time before he really knew God as a dark time in his life.

There was a time when what was most important to me was money,
and making money, and I was held bondage to that…
You want to own anything and everything because
you’re sold to the idea that this is going to make me happy.

Our society teaches that material things will make us happy,
and it’s a lie. Material things don’t.
When we stop and look back
on the things that are important in our lives,
it’s really relationships, and people, and the experiences we have with people…

I have learned by the word of God that we do have a responsibility
to our fellow man, and a moral obligation to care for each other,
and to do what’s right to each other.
It’s not just about making money…
My integrity means more than a dollar bill.
In the day and time in which we live, how much of that is the case?
I think the dollar bill means more to a lot of people than their integrity,
or their care or love of their fellow man.

Crandall’s believes that this unending desire to obtain more stuff, to own more things, to make more money, drives people insane. He believes that learning to be content is an important step in Christian life. Crandall’s new farming operation is focused closer to home with pastured cattle, which allows him to interact and fellowship more with his neighbors.

Whenever my eyes were opened that that was a problem in my life
I asked for help in overcoming that.
I was blessed to be able to lay that down and learn to be content…

There is more peace, and joy, and contentment
in my heart than there ever was before…
it’s not about what I have, but it’s about what I’m able to give to others.
That’s where true joy comes in.
Spending time with people is one way that Crandall shares with others. He helps his neighbor, my grandfather, Elton Fountain, for instance. Elton recently suffered a battle with prostate cancer and is recovering well, but has been somewhat limited over the last several months in how he can work with his own livestock. Again, this impetus, this disposition, is one that he shares with Oliver. One of the favorite stories that both Crandall and Edward tell of Oliver is about how he would also lend his hand to his neighbors when they needed him.

There’s one particular story that sticks out:
How granddad, when he was done plowing his fields,
   he didn’t say anything to anybody,
   he just walked right straight across,
      over into that field and started plowing theirs,
         because see it was Mrs. Soodie and the children.
That sort of giving—he gave not to be recognized, not to be given an award, he just gave because his heart desired to help.

That is going to be the foundation of our business.
   It’s going to be on biblical principles.

Currently, Crandall is in the process of creating a different kind of agriculture on Oliver Fountain Road. He and his father, Edward, are pursuing a course to produce what Crandall considers a premium product of pastured Angus cattle. He has named his new business O.D. Fountain Farms, which Crandall explains is “for the heritage of granddad,” Oliver Dixon Fountain. He sees an opportunity and a market for this kind of product, and he hopes to create great tasting beef. The importance of family is tangible, and not only in name of his business. Crandall lends a hand to other farmers in the community like my granddaddy, who is his second cousin, although he refers to him as Uncle Elton. In October of 2010, while we were on the road to the livestock market in Ayden with a trailer full of my grandfather’s cows, Crandall outlined his wishes for O.D. Fountain Farms. I sat in the backseat with an audio recorder as Crandall spoke and steered granddaddy, the cows, and me towards the market.

I do see a shift, back to people being more conscious
about where their food is coming from,
and that's where I see the opportunity...
We're trying to market something that's safe, something that
you know where it comes from, and a better product:
We want to produce a top quality product.
That is one of my goals that I wrote out to start with.

See, I even see the place where, one day, we’re raising our own grain,
and making our own feed, so we know exactly what’s in that feed:
where we keep it consistent.

Ours is a vegetarian diet. The majority of what we’re going to market is
a natural vegetarian diet. What that means is:
they don't have any hormones, they don’t have any antibiotics,
and they’re fed forages and grain, no meat by-products and cinder feed.

We do treat our animals: If we have an animal get sick, we treat them,
because we think that that’s the humane thing to do.
But, we market that animal separately and sell him differently.
We don’t sell him under our label…

To me what’s more important to me—
yes I am concerned about feed conversion, but not that much—
I want an excellent quality product with a good taste.
I’m more concerned with the flavor and the texture
and the quality of the product, and that it’s born, and raised,
and grown out here on the farm.

We know what we’re presenting.
Our integrity is important to us:
that we present what we say we’re going to present.

More than just raising great beef, Crandall is describing a way of life. This habitus
considers creating good food as a critical part of creating a good life. Living with integrity, doing
what is morally right, and doing what his family has done for generations are central to this way
of life. Crandall’s vision for his own life was inspired by the memory of his grandfather.

This is something that I want to bring back, in a sense,
or build from: Granddaddy Oliver grew turkeys,
he grew pigs, he would kill a cow,
and my understanding was that when they’d kill a cow a lot of times
they didn’t have any way to preserve it—so like with pork
he had a smoke house, so they would smoke their own meat, and salt it, and
they were able to preserve it—but they would sell when they killed beef,
to different people in the community.

They would take those products, the pork and the turkeys and go to Wilmington…
That’s what you lived for, really, for a lot of people: to be able to produce food.

Crandall recognizes that one way to produce safe, wholesome beef, it must be raised in a safe environment. This means taking care of the land and the pasture the cattle graze on. He is particularly concerned with the use of certain herbicides and other chemical inputs, like MSMA. This organic arsenate is commonly used on golf courses, but some farmers spray MSMA on cow pastures to control invasive weeds. Cattle consume the chemical and from there it enters the food chain. When he discovered this organic herbicide’s toxic potential, Crandall decided against using it on his farm.

That’s the thing I think we’ve got to be very responsible about, to make sure that what we’re doing is not bad for both the environment and the health of people.

That’s where I don’t think we’re doing a good job as producers and fellow men: in making sure that what we are feeding is not getting passed on to people, that people are eating that chemical, or being introduced to that chemical because of what you fed that cow.

I think we need to be a little more particular…

We need to make sure that residue is not getting into the food chain. When that grain’s harvested, has it been long enough that it’s not within that grain?

I hope and pray that that research is there—and that it is not a biased research, that it is not being bought and paid for by a chemical company to hide this.

That’s one of the things about the world in which we live now, Chris, is that it’s driven by greed a lot of times, and people are willing to do things that are morally wrong…I just believe it’s always right to do the right thing…

We need to be open to the truth, whatever that truth is, and stand behind that truth…

Because that’s what, as family farmers, we need to know—and we should want to know what that truth is—so we’re not harming those around us or ourselves.
Crandall’s model is fundamentally different than the vertically integrated agriculture that defines farming in this region today. The first example of this has to do with genre: he is raising cattle instead of hogs. This is not to say that cattle are unusual in this region, far from it. Joab Fountain kept cattle in the eighteenth century (Fountain 1992, 20). Although cows were valued more for their milk than their meat, cattle were integral to early farms in the region. Oliver and Edward always had a few cows. They were a part of the landscape when I was growing up in Fountaintown. Before retiring from Merita Breads, my granddaddy Elton always did a little farming on the side. Cattle husbandry has been his primary occupation since he left Merita in the early 1990s. Eastern Carolina was once known for what Crandall termed “scrap cattle,” cows which were difficult to market. This changed in the last fifteen years, due in part to the integration of the hog and poultry industry. The lagoon and sprayfield system developed to deal with the massive amounts of animal waste has increased the amount of grass grown in the region. This asset attracted cattle industry. Crandall saw the opportunity and went for it. As Crandall explains, he was in the right place at the right time on more than one occasion.

We’ve got what I would say is a nucleus herd of about fifteen to seventeen animals that we want to expand upon, those being our very best animals. Your granddaddy was with me the day I bought part of them. He helped me buy them. We got them in Rocky Mount, a sale up there called the Partner Sale. That was a wonderful blessing, Chris.

Crandall left the contract-farming world. He returned to school at Mount Olive College to study religion. He was recently ordained in the Original Freewill Baptist Church. Crandall sees a connection between his new agricultural practices and his spiritual growth.

To be honest, Chris, it was part of the good Lord’s leading, I believe. I didn’t understand it then, but now, in school, where I’m at, and where I’m headed, I can see that his hand was upon it. And I believe that even within our cattle stuff.
You Reap What You Sow

Joab Fountain attended the Particular Baptist Church at Muddy Creek. In 1836, it was renamed the Muddy Creek Primitive Baptist Church, and continued to be known by that name when Oliver Fountain attended. Edward Fountain attends the same church to this day. Crandall recently accepted a nomination as the Interim Pastor at Sneads Ferry Original Free Will Baptist. Crandall’s call to preach is informed by his family’s background in the church. The doctrines of the two churches differ slightly but they share a disposition: salvation. Crandall thinks and lives by this religious ideology. Crandall’s habitus informs his worldview, and pushes him to address problems in his community, and society at large. Crandall’s thoughts and actions are guided by his predecessors and the Bible. This “inheritance” is as apparent in his reflections on culture and agriculture as it is in his preaching. The following text provides examples of both.

One Thursday morning in March, 2011 sitting in Oliver’s farmhouse, we talked for quite some time. Crandall was installing the new version of Microsoft Outlook on his father’s computer. We spoke while the discs spun. Towards the end of a three-hour visit, the conversation moved from agriculture and we began to speak more generally about culture. I was interested in the way that our economy and systems of food production affect culture. I was also interested in the ways that culture responds to change. The familiar discussion of the big box store, and its effects on local communities and their economies, came up quickly.

We can’t just continue to use up resources and throw it away.
We need to find a way to recycle.
We need to be doing more and more of that.

See that’s another part of our culture, and a society that I don’t think is good, Chris, is that we have become a throw-away culture.
Things are designed and built now to last x-number of years, and you don’t repair it, you throw it away and buy a new one—and that bothers me.
We’ve got where we don’t fix things.
It costs more to fix it than they can sell one for.
Now all of a sudden these jobs that were, people repairing, fixing, building things are now people in China and other places…
We can get it cheaper but at the same time, if we look at the bigger picture, we’re putting a man out of work.
Yeah, we’re getting it cheaper, but in the long run we don’t have any jobs for the people to work in America.
I’d rather spend a little more money and buy it locally from somebody I know than to ride to Jacksonville and pay and send that money to Arkansas. That’s just my personal opinion.

And I wonder: will we see that change, or are we already beginning to see that change with food? And will we see that change back eventually, or will we have to get to a place in America that we don’t have a lot of expendable money to drive us to that point?

We’re using resources that we’re throwing away instead of investing that for a lifetime, and right on beyond.

Crandall believes people are too entangled in the trappings of contemporary life to properly care for what is most important: family, health, community, God. As we talked about his grandfather, Crandall reflected on the differences during Oliver’s time and today.

I think they had a better life than we do today, because, and I’ve preached on this several times: they invested in each other. They invested in each other, they spent time with each other, they helped one another. We live so fast today that we’re running here to there. I think we do, I think we live to fast, and we’re not able to invest in each other’s lives.

Back then, if something happened, everybody would bunch up and help one another. That time, even though it was hard, difficult, it was time spent together, fellowshipping with one another. I think we’ve lost that. So, at times I think their life was better, even though it was difficult at times. It sure seemed that they ate mighty good. They worked hard. My granddaddy ate great big—now he could eat! But he worked too. He worked that off…

We’ve got to be careful in the steps we take and make sure we think it through. And it’s not just about the bottom line, not just about the board of directors demanding profit.
We need to get back to a place where we care enough about our fellow man that we want to do the right thing, where we’re interested in what happens to him, and it’s not just about making money. I just think we’ve got away from that as a society.

I think greed controls too much.

It comes back to a biblical philosophy—loving each other. You think about what this world would be like, our communities.

I’d love to see this community turned upside down because we cared and loved each other so much, we desired to see the good, we desired to see people succeed, we desired to see them do well. In turn, maybe that person would then invest more money back into the community, and share it with one another…

I would love to see us do that, that we cared so much for our fellow man that we were willing to sacrifice, that we were willing to do without a little something. There are a lot of things we could sacrifice. This world would be a better place. So that’s really my philosophy, what drives me, as far as our moral obligation.

But it’s not just an obligation, Chris, it’s a desire: to help people, to see people do good, to share.

I just think it would be mighty great if we were as concerned for others are we are for ourselves. Then we wouldn’t have to be worried about our food supply. We wouldn’t have to be worried about if Toyota’s selling a car or Dodge is selling a car that they know they’re having problems with, that they know that something’s going to happen, so many people are going to get killed and they know because they ran the numbers and they’re better off not to do anything about it. Know that they’re going to do the right thing.

I’d love to see us eventually get back to that as a society and that culturally we were concerned more about each other as much as we our about ourselves. That gets a little bit away from agriculture but that gives you the foundation on which I want to build our business.
I have lived both lives. I’ve lived that life for myself where it was all about me. There’s some parts of it that I am so ashamed of and embarrassed about. There was one particular summer that we worked so hard that I forgot my dad’s birthday. That haunts me to this moment.

I was driven so much by the dollar that I didn’t even care for my family. And I didn’t, I was worried about me—and I hate that. But in that, I hope that I can use that to teach people, because I can look back and see the misery in which I lived, and didn’t even know it.

Now, the peace and joy I have—there’s no comparison, it’s such a huge difference. There’s no comparison in the two…

See, there’s a block of my life that I didn’t do any of that with my family because it was all about me, myself, and I. There was that time period when I was not concerned with if a chemical made it into the cattle, that wasn’t my major frame of thought, because I was one of those that said, “Oh, there ain’t nothing to that.” I was not willing to think about the whole way down the line. It was all about making money. But when that began to change, then you do think about what’s right…

When I lay my head down at night to go to sleep I don’t want to be worried about if I’ve done somebody wrong today, or if I’ve taken advantage of somebody. If I’ve got to err I want to err on the side that they’ve got the benefit instead of me. If our nation was about that we’d be a better place to live.

While standing up to leave, I thanked Crandall for taking so much time to talk to me. I asked him what he would be preaching about next Sunday. Crandall explained his theme would be “Reaping as you sow.” He invited me to join him and ride together to Sneads Ferry, just over thirty miles away, to the Original Free Will Baptist Church. Three days later, Crandall came by to pick me up about ten o’clock in the morning. I got in the truck. It was the first time in months that I had put on a suit. When we arrived at the small white building on Fulchers Landing Road,
Crandall pulled behind the church to park. He received a text message from the Joe Ard. He is Crandall’s friend and the Pastor of my parents’ church, Bethlehem Free Will Baptist. The message read: Preach the WORD!

After Crandall introduced me to several members of the congregation I took a seat in the front pew on the right side of the aisle. The service began with a few words from a deacon and a song by the children’s choir, “I’m in the Lord’s Army.” This was followed by an offering, a prayer, and a few verses of “Trust and Obey” sung together by the congregation. Crandall then took the pulpit and preached from the book of Galatians, Chapter Six verses seven through ten. Those verses read:

Do not be deceived. God is not mocked.
For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.
For he who sows to the flesh will the flesh reap corruption.
But he who sows to the spirit, will of the spirit reap ever lasting life.
And let us not grow weary while doing good.
For in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.
Therefore as we have opportunity let us do good to all, especially to those who are the household of faith.

After Crandall read the lines above he said a short prayer. He asked that the hearts and minds of the congregants be open to God’s word and for them to receive that word and apply it to their lives. Crandall grabbed the pulpit on both sides and leaned forward.

We reap what we sow, more than we sow, later than we sow.
It is a principle of God. It is a universal principle.
It begins here with a reverence for God.
It says that “Do not deceive, God is not mocked.”
In other words, we can’t expect to sow to the flesh or the things of the flesh or the things of this world and expect to reap spiritual things.
God’s principles should bring about a desire for obedience and expectation of Him fulfilling His law.
Not an expectation that we can live anyway that we want to and expect his blessing.
When we live anyway we want to that is apart from God, we will reap that that we sow.

Now, being an old farm boy, this is one that’s a little easier for me to grasp and understand.
Because I understand that if you
prepare your rows this spring and you plant corn,
you don’t expect to harvest butter beans or squash, do you?
Even though I like those very well, you can tell, ha!
You reap what you sow.
If you plant a kernel of corn, you’re going to reap a harvest of corn,
not of something else.
I like the analogy of the vineyard:
You can’t expect to sow thistles or thorns and reap grapes…

One way to sow to the spirit, Crandall preached, is to extend a hand to neighbors in need. The emphasis in the text below appears to indicate the powerfully emotive tremelo that I heard in Crandall’s voice.

Brothers and sisters, I’ll share with you, there is no greater joy
 to me than when there is a dire need and you reach out—
 and I don’t mean with fanfare,
 waving so that everybody can see you, but when you reach out—
 and meet that need.
*That is a wonderful feeling. And you know, and you see that love and that expression, they weren’t expecting it, and you see that you’ve met a need that they have in their life.*
The Lord blesses us with such wonderful joy you can’t explain.
The world *can’t touch that.*
It tries to. It tries to offer many ways in which it can touch it but it can’t.
I believe that you will be rewarded when you sow into the kingdom of God…

Crandall’s sermon, like his farming, echoes his ideas about patience and long-term care and stewardship to the land and its people.

If we go out and plant a kernel of corn today or we plant a grape vine today,
we can’t expect to go back tomorrow and reap a harvest of corn or grapes.
No need to get the pot warmed up with water, is there?
To get our seasoning meat ready?
Because it’s not yet time.
We have to be patient.
We have to let that seed germinate and produce the fruit.
And I believe sometimes today we’re impatient:
we plant and we sow into the lives of others and sow into the kingdom of God,
we sow into the church, or ever where we’ve been called to sow
and we don’t see that prosper right away,
we begin to think “uh oh, this doesn’t work.”
And what happens, if you go and dig that seed up,
because in a week it hasn’t begun to grow,
or it hasn’t produced the fruit you wanted that quickly, and you go and dig that seed up, it’s not going to...
We need to be patient and trust God in his time...
We should have a desire to sow to the spirit, and also recognize the rewards eternally...

It not only requires sowing, it requires the work after that.
   It requires the fertilization.
   It requires the watering.
   It requires the cultivating.
And we’re gifted, all differently, and with all different talents, and we’re to use that talent so that the seeds that are planted here in Sneads Ferry will grow and will produce the fruit that God desires it to produce...

After hearing this, shouldn’t we desire to sow to the kingdom of God? After we read his word and hear what it says here, shouldn’t we desire to sow to the Spirit and reap the fruits of the Spirit? Galatians Five : twenty-two shares what the fruits of the Spirit are:
   love,
   joy,
   peace,
   long-suffering,
   kindness,
   goodness,
   faithfulness.
Brothers and sisters, if we desire to reap the fruits of the spirit, we must sow the seeds that are to the spirit and not to the flesh.
We must sow the seeds that will produce spiritual things, and not fleshly things.
We reap what we sow, more than we sow, later than we sow.

The service ended with a prayer and a call to the altar. This is the portion of the service in many evangelical Baptist churches when the preacher asks the congregation if anyone has not yet committed their life to Jesus, and if they would like to do so at that time. Amid much handshaking we made our way back to the car. I reflected on the seeds that Crandall is sowing in Fountaintown and took comfort in the harvest he will reap, and most importantly, the vision he has planted for his community.
Conclusion

When this project began I expected it to take a very different form. My longstanding interest in hogs and pork first led me to farmers who were raising hogs “on the ground,”—keeping hogs outside but fenced, rather than in confined animal feeding operations. I envisioned this thesis as an ethnographic study of “traditional” or non-industrial farmers and their worlds. The family I had originally intended to study lives in a community near Fountaintown. They raise a large number of organic vegetables along with pork and poultry. Like Crandall, this family’s habitus is inherited, based upon memory, family, and religion. Also like Crandall, this family is very busy. As my academic deadlines approached, I leaned forward—attempting to zoom in with my ethnographic lens—and my collaborators leaned back. With more time, an ethnographic study of this family will hopefully come to fruition, and should.

I searched for another voice from the agricultural world in which I was raised. In the beginning, I did not imagine that my thesis would focus on a cattleman, and especially not one so close to home. My mother, Donna Fowler, suggested I talk to Crandall, since he had been a contract hog farmer. I am embarrassed for not thinking of him sooner. The best part of my research began with our first recorded conversation back in October of 2010—the day we carried a load of my granddaddy’s cows to the auction in Ayden.

Henry Glassie writes “Ethnographic work is collaborative, dependent on generosity, on patience and respect” (2006:115). Locating a better collaborator than Crandall is nigh on impossible. A more patient and more generous person would be hard to find. We speak the same language: we share a common background and mutual respect. I suspect that the most difficult part about working with Crandall is his reluctance to have so much attention given to him and his affairs. He is a humble man.

I learned that Crandall, like many of the farmers in the area, had faced serious changes in
his work. The free market and policy makers controlled the changing American agricultural scene. Crandall’s response to this changing world is what makes this story unique. Crandall’s disposition, or habitus, provides a structure to respond to an ever-changing milieu. Some folklorists might talk about this in terms of “tradition.” I call his habitus an inheritance. To quote Glassie once again, “tradition—or something like it with another name—is the inbuilt motive force of culture.” (2003:193) Inheritance is like tradition, but with another name. It is the motivating force for how Crandall lives and works—how he feels and remembers. Inheritance speaks to the intimacy and holistic way in which ideas and action are transmitted from one generation to the next.

In this work I learned about creating good work from what you have. Crandall is an example of a person who is reaching into the resources of his humanity to create a better future. The words and wisdom that he shared with me taught me about taking the best from the past to build a better future. As my most important teacher, it is only appropriate that he have the last word:

I’ve studied a lot about community—
just like the community of faith—
and impacting communities,
and that’s my desire:
to make a difference in the community of people.

They’re not all going to believers,
but if our focus is on that community
and not just ourselves, but as ourselves as a part of that community,
and what’s best for that community,
we’ll make different decisions than we’re making today, I believe.
Appendix I
Genealogical Maps

A. Rendering of the land where Crandall currently resides and farms.

B. Lineage by which the above land has passed over eight generations.

1. Joab Fountain (c. 1745-1800)---Mary James
2. John Fountain (c. 1777-1860)---Martha Parker (c. 1783-1855)
3. Hosea Fountain (1824-1910)---Annie Jane Horne (1825-1884)
4. Nelson Frank Fountain (1849-1928)---Harriett Simpson (1846-1907)
5. Henry Lewis Fountain (1872-1917)---Julian Alice Brown (1878-1962)
6. Oliver Dixon Fountain (1899-1987)---Margie Anna Brown (1900-1977)
7. Edward Louis Fountain (1941- )---Laura Frances Register (1945- )
8. Crandall Fountain (1964- )
Appendix II
Photographs

A. Crandall Fountain at home (April 2011)
B. Crandall Fountain (l) with his father, Edward Fountain (r)
C. Oliver Fountain’s 1917 Farmhouse where Edward now resides.

D. Oliver Fountain’s smokehouse. Now located at Tarkil Branch Farms Museum.
E. Three Calves

F. The Old Well
G. Family Cemetery

H. Oliver and Margie Fountain’s Tombstone
I. Near sunset.
Bibliography


