

Mary Thompson talks about the gardens and animals her family kept in the mill village.

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Carl and Mary Thompson interviewed by James Leloudis, Charlotte, NC, July 9, 1979. Interview #H-182 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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Jim Leloudis

You said you had your own animals and all. I guess you had a garden, too.

Mary Thompson

Yes, we had a garden. The mill company gave a place to put your hogs. And the cows was back in the backyard. They had barns, with four stalls in it for four houses, and every house had one stall for a cow. But our hogs had to be on down. There was a place down there fixed for them. We had chickens, mostly, in the yard, but we had a little garden. But about three or four blocks from there there was some open land, and we had a garden there. They let us have gardens there. And we always had a garden, raised our own things and had our own meat and our own milk and butter. And my mother sold buttermilk. We liked butter very well, but we wasn't crazy about milk, so she sold milk and made money thataway. But we did drink what we wanted. Most of the milk we ever wanted was buttermilk. None of us children wasn't crazy about any other kind of milk. We made pretty good. My mother canned vegetables and things. Back then, people were very nice to one another, too. If one didn't have it, they wanted to divide with them, you know. People was more neighborly then than they are now. We had a good life. We didn't have things. I don't have much now—I never have had—so it doesn't make much difference to me. But still, we didn't have things like they have now. We didn't even have rugs on the floor till I got pretty good size. We scrubbed the floors. My daddy was the bossman when he was at Poe Mill, so they put water in our house, and we had water and bath and all. But all the regular mill people that lived there had pumps out on the street, and that was cooler water than what was in the house, so we'd get our drinking water out there, mostly. But we didn't have to tote water for things, but I have worked for neighbors, help them wash clothes and scrub floors for them. We'd go anywhere around anybody wanted to hire us, twenty-five cents a room to scrub a floor. And I mean you had to scrub it and tote the water from way over across the street.

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