“From Farm to Factory: Transitions in Work, Gender, and Leisure at Banning Mill, 1910–1930s”

By Teresa Beyer-Sherwood

Abstract  This study explores new and traditional forms of leisure enjoyed by white southern rural millhands at Banning Mill between 1910 and the 1930s. As they moved from farm to factory, millhands experienced unfamiliar working conditions, changes in gender roles in and outside the home, and an increase in leisure time. While both farmers and millhands had opportunities to socialize, this study will compare traditional forms of entertainment available to farmers with similar and new recreations found in rural mill villages such as Banning Mill in Carroll County, Georgia.

A comparison of leisure activities also reveals new ways in which rural cotton millhands separated themselves in social settings. Gender divisions in village recreation reflect changing roles at home as men and women coped with the transition from farm to factory in different ways. Specific or individual interests created an atmosphere in which wives, husbands, teenagers, and children typically socialized with members of their own sex and age. Juxtaposing the ways in which men and women choose to spend their free time suggests husbands had a more difficult time adjusting to work and life in mill villages than their spouses or children.

Keywords: Mill towns, Banning Mill, Georgia, Leisure, Women Migration.

Few factories dotted the South’s landscape at the eve of the Civil War. As the phoenix rose from the ashes, the dawn of the New South brought increased industrialization, and with it,
changes in work and leisure for landless farmers. As white share-croppers migrated to mill villages throughout the South, they were greeted with unfamiliar working conditions, changes in gender roles, challenges to patriarchal order, and above all, new forms of leisure. Farm families maintained traditional forms of secular and religious entertainment while taking advantage of an increase in free time to participate in new recreations, such as baseball games and company-sponsored events. Using Banning Mill, a pre-Civil war cotton mill located in rural west Georgia as an example, this essay explores the similarities and differences between traditional forms of entertainment on the farm and new ones available in rural mill villages throughout the Georgia Piedmont during the early twentieth century.

Examining the ways in which millhands used their leisure time provides insights on how individuals adapted to or dealt with the transition from farm to factory. A comparison of gendered social events reveals how men and women adjusted to life in mill villages in different ways. While wives continued to use their free time to care for neighbors or provide necessities for their families, husbands escaped from reality in less productive ways. The ways in which husbands and young men socialized

Banning Mill, circa 1900. Courtesy of Center for Public History University of West Georgia.
hints at the difficulties they faced coping with the transition from farm to factory.

To date, historians have not discussed in depth the transition of southern yeomen and their families from farms to mill villages in terms of leisure. Two recent scholarly works, *Like a Family* and *Plain Folk in the New South*, include discussions about entertainment within mill villages, yet both regard social events as little more than traditional pastimes perpetuated in a new environment.¹ These studies conclude with little analytical insight into the important differences between leisure time on the farm and that of the factory. Although the authors pay equal attention to the factory work of male and female millhands, neither provides much insight into the leisure activities available in the mill community.

When discussing farm families, southern scholars mention little about activities outside the home. Perhaps this is because little happened outside the farm house or field. Visiting and attending church were the most common leisure activities mentioned. Southern historians often touch upon more topics than revivals, singings, and house parties, but not in great detail. Until now, little has been done to compare entertainment available on southern farms to social opportunities within rural mill villages.

Historian Jack Kirby suggests that one impetus to the move to mill villages and factory towns was the availability of more sports and recreations. However, Kirby also notes that “scholars have only begun to address this subject in systematic fashion, and much remains to be learned.”² Using leisure as a window into rural Southern mill villages, this study seeks to open discussion about the variety of entertainments available to millhands and their families and the ways in which the transition from farm to factory influenced gendered recreations.


Oral histories provide some of the best evidence of leisure activities. Those interviewed for the Banning Mill Documentation Project who were first or second generation industrial transplants vividly recall the transition. Most, particularly women and children, appreciated the difference in routine, work, and localization of neighbors and social events. *Like a Family* best utilizes oral interviews to illustrate the lifestyle and history of southern millhands. Similar to this groundbreaking work, this study utilizes oral histories, census data, newspaper accounts, church records, photographs, and family histories to construct a compelling and more complete history of mill village life in the west Georgia Piedmont.

The Banning Mill Documentation collection is compiled of approximately 40 oral histories. Most of the men and women interviewed were born between 1912 and 1932 and typically lived in Banning’s mill village as children or worked at the factory as teenagers. The individuals interviewed came from families who had established themselves in the community and their grandparents had typically worked at the mill. Thus, the Banning Mill Documentation Collection is composed of the memories of millhands whose families chose to stay in the community despite financial hardships and better opportunities elsewhere.

At the turn of the twentieth century, west Georgia, like the rest of the South, was primarily rural. Farm families produced cotton as their cash crop, supplementing it with corn and other row crops. Animals such as cows, chickens, and hogs, along with small gardens, provided items to trade and additional food. Year after year, sharecroppers and tenant farmers living on small plots of land struggled to pay off debts and provide for their growing families. Life on the farm was strenuous, time consuming, and often financially unrewarding. White sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the South faced economic hardships with determination and a system of family labor. While each member of the family had specific duties, these divisions of labor were not dictated by land owners’ concepts of gender.

Farmers who owned their land traditionally worked in the field with hired hands while their wives kept house in a “civilized” manner. Sharecroppers also divided work by gender, but when times were difficult, called for their wives and children to join
them in the fields. Male tenant farmers oversaw fieldwork with the help of their wives and children, cared for mules and pigs, went to town for supplies, and in some cases, produced moonshine for sale and consumption. Women on tenant farms labored for hours in the house cooking, cleaning, washing, sewing, starching, and caring for their youngest children. Chickens and cows also needed tending to. Teenagers either worked in the field alongside their father or assisted with childcare and housework.3

This division of labor seems fairly balanced until one takes into consideration the amount of time women spent in the fields with their husbands. While some women planted, hoed, shocked wheat, hauled hay, and plowed on top of their labors inside the house, they did not receive an equal return of services from their husbands. In most cases, men did not assist in any of the household duties. Circumstances for sharecroppers and tenant farmers dictated wives had to be both men and women.4

Additional duties outside the house dictated women had less free time than men. The division of labor actually produced more leisure time for men. For example, “though both sexes might gather for a harvest dinner or wedding celebration, women undertook the laborious task of preparing refreshments, serving meals, and cleaning up afterwards. Gender roles thus shaped women’s participation in and enjoyment of these common ‘leisure’ events.”5 Yet, corn shuckings, fairs, carnivals, weddings, and revivals were infrequent occurrences. There were not many opportunities to socialize in the countryside and leisure time for

5 Martin, 150.
white sharecroppers and tenants in the South was rare. Unlike their counterparts in mill villages, who had frequent opportunities to visit, women on rural farms could go weeks, even months without seeing family or neighbors.

Examinations of rural families in the twentieth century suggest farmers had little time for social events and recreation. An early 1920s study by Columbia University anthropologist Frank Tannenbaum in an undisclosed North Carolina farming community revealed “that more than 70 percent of the inhabitants had not attended a single party or public meeting in an entire year; more than 80 percent had neither attended nor participated in an athletic event, and more than 90 percent had not been to a dance.”  

Historian Rebecca Sharpless recalls a study performed in 1920 involving one hundred farmers in Hunt County, Texas, that revealed only 13 families who visited daily, 40 who visited on a weekly basis and 47 who went weeks without visiting. The 13 families probably represent land-owning farmers who had the financial means to secure hired hands and whose wives did not work in the fields. It is also likely that the majority of farmers polled who did not visit on a weekly basis were tenant farmers.

The most common forms of socializing, church and visiting on Sundays, were dampened by time constraints, muddy roads, poor means of transportation, (distances between four and twelve miles or more could be considered “too far” for visiting), lack of proper attire, work, and pregnancy. When any form of recreation was obtainable, it usually “revolved around home, church, and kin and was often linked to work of some kind.” Women would gather to quilt or can while groups of men provided assistance with harvesting tasks. It was unusual for women or children to go visiting on their own. Although they might divide and socialize by gender once the family reached their destination, women and children “did not leave their homes without their husbands … primary connections were between

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6 Kirby, 300.
7 Sharpless, 190.
8 Distances were estimated with information from Hagood, 170, and Sharpless, 33.
9 Martin, 152.
the men, but the wives welcomed the chance to socialize.” On their own, men might hunt, fish, drink, or, if the farm house was close to a country store, gather there to swap stories.

Why then would men, who had more leisure time than women, move their families off the farm? As the South’s economy deteriorated, it became increasingly difficult to make a living farming. It was often a tough decision to leave, but soon entire families were forced into the factories. For impoverished white sharecroppers, relocating to a mill village meant a better chance of survival. As farm families moved from the land to the mill, they quickly came to realize “public work” and their village habitat was drastically different from life on the farm.

For one, migrants found themselves living closer to their neighbors. Porches were no longer private extensions of the home and windows needed covering. Not that lack of privacy was a new concept. Farmers with numerous children and small, two-room homes, had learned to be discreet about their sexual relations, while pregnant wives attempted to deliver away from the eyes and ears of younger children. These concerns, along with the close proximity of new neighbors, were factors in the adjustments to life in mill villages.

Perhaps more daunting than crowded housing were the differences between farming and “public work.” In the mill village, men, women, and children were no longer called to work by sunrise, but by a factory bell. Working ten to twelve hours a day, no longer as one’s own boss, farmers who made the transition had to readjust their internal clock from the land to the factory.

10 Sharpless, 191.
11 Unlike Northern industries that often relied on the cheap labor of single girls (for example, Lowell Mills, Massachusetts), most “southern mill owners quickly settled on the family labor system.” Hall et al., eds., Like a Family, 52.
12 “When southern farmers left the land and took a cotton mill job, they called it ‘public work.’ The phrase gained currency during the Great Depression as government programs put thousands of the unemployed on federal payrolls, but for at least two generations southern millhands had used it to describe their encounter with factory labor.” Ibid., 44.
14 The search for privacy on farms is discussed in Hagood, Sharpless and Walker.
Millhands also had to cope with foremen who shouted, cursed, manhandled children, and pressured young women for dates and sexual favors. Although the work could be frustrating, dangerous, and physically demanding (machinery was loud, dirty, and complex), at some point each day it stopped. For the first time in their lives, entire families had more time to gather with neighbors, friends, and co-workers within the village on Saturdays when work often ended at noon, on Sundays, and for special events and holidays.

While the impact Banning Mill had on shaping the outlying countryside is unclear, its rural location allowed people to transition from farmers to millhands numerous times. The Horsley brothers remember their father working at Banning Mill during the winter and farming the rest of the season. Interviews in the Banning Mill Documentation Collection reveal a similar trend. When men thought they could make a better living on the farm, they stayed or returned. When financial difficulties arose, they typically moved their family back to the mill village at Banning.

Banning never became an urban center, yet figures suggest there were usually more individuals employed at the mill than farming in the immediate vicinity. In 1900 and 1910, there were approximately 120 residents living in or on the outskirts of Banning’s mill village. More specifically, in 1920, 95 African Americans and whites had jobs as farmers or helpers on farms in Banning’s militia district 1541, while 131 white individuals


16 Hershal and Talmadge Horsley, tape recorded interview by author, March 14, 2004, Center for Public History at the State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.

17 Information gathered from the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Carroll County, Georgia, and the Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Carroll County, Georgia. Complete transcriptions of these census years were difficult to generate due to poor penmanship and stains on the original copies.
worked in the cotton mill.\textsuperscript{18} Before the beginning of the Great Depression, there were more people employed at Banning Mill than farmers in the district. When the mill closed in 1929, it left approximately 173 employees without work. When it opened again in 1930, it only employed 67 hands.\textsuperscript{19} The 1930 census shows 57 African American and Caucasian families living on farms in Banning. While most of the white families were farming, Banning’s African American population was taking in laundry from the village or working at the local saw mill. On the four roads that made up Banning’s mill village in 1930—Villa Rica Road, Front, Middle, and Back Ridge—there were a total of 38 white families. All of the families had heads of household and/or children working in the cotton mill.\textsuperscript{20} The mill shut down three more times between 1932 and 1941.\textsuperscript{21} Although some families remained in the village during these shutdowns, without work or management, the mill never regained the economic stability which previously allowed it to draw large number of workers from local farms.

Men, women, and children had different reactions to the transition from farm to factory. In some cases, men had to compete with their wives and children for jobs and, for them, the transition proved to be more difficult. During the initial stages of industrialization in the South, factory owners considered women and children more desirable workers.\textsuperscript{22} In 1870 there were 36 employees at the cotton mill, 20 of them women ranging in age from 9 to 30; the mean age for female workers was 19.\textsuperscript{23} Female mill hands who had steady work that paid in cash (or company script called “beaucoup” at Banning), provided their family with essential financial resources. While wives and young daughters fell under the jurisdiction of mill bosses and foremen,

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\textsuperscript{18} Information gathered from the Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920, Carroll County, Georgia. Individuals were counted by job descriptions.

\textsuperscript{19} Carroll County Times, 1929–1930 and Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Carroll County, Georgia.

\textsuperscript{20} Information gathered from the Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Carroll County, Georgia. Families were counted by the number of heads of households.

\textsuperscript{21} Carroll County Times, 1932–1941.

\textsuperscript{22} Hall et al., eds., 56.

\textsuperscript{23} Statistics generated from the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Carroll County, Georgia.
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husbands may have felt their roles as providers and heads of households challenged. In an age of growing industry and consumerism, it was nearly impossible for male millhands to support large families on a single salary.

After the Civil War, and during Henry Grady’s “New South” campaign, Banning Mill was filled with experienced foremen, usually from the North, and young women. By 1900, Banning’s work force was still made up of young children, both male and female, but they no longer outnumbered the men. In fact, figures suggest there was always a small majority of males employed at the mill between 1900 and 1930. In 1900 there were 43 cotton mill employees living in Banning’s mill village. Twenty-three workers were older males, while the remaining 20 were young women ranging in age from 9 to 35. Employed male heads of households ranged in age from 29 to 50, while their younger counterparts (mostly sons) ranged from 7 to 23 years old. The mean age of males within the factory was 30. Compared with the mean age of females, it becomes clear Banning’s work force was still composed of older males and the young daughters of local farmers and village residents.24

Although records are unclear, it seems about 120 individuals worked at Banning’s cotton factory or nearby hosiery mill in 1910.25 Of these 120, 15 were heads of households (fathers), while three were wives. The 54 males ranged in age from 10 to 55. The 39 female employees ranged in age from 11 to 69. The mean age of male workers employed at either Banning’s cotton mill or hosiery mill was 21, while the mean age for females was 19.26

In 1920, approximately 131 men, women, and children were employed at the Banning cotton mill. Out of the 85 men working, 61 were heads of households (fathers), while of 46 women, only 12 were working mothers. Six women were working widows, while five were young wives without children. The mean age of

24 Information compiled from the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Carroll County, Georgia.
25 Out of the 120 individuals, it is likely 78 were employed in the cotton mill while the remaining 38 found employment in the hosiery mill.
26 Information gathered from an incomplete transcription of the Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Carroll County, Georgia, that was difficult to read. Many of the individuals’ names, ages, and sexes were obscured by ink blots and poor penmanship.
working males was 50 with a range from 14 to 68. Working ages for women ranged from 8 to 66 with a mean age of 29.²⁷

During the Great Depression, Banning’s work force dropped dramatically. In 1930, 67 men, women, and children worked at the mill. Thirty-seven were married men, two were widows, and one was a working mother. Men ranged from age 14 to 67 with a mean of 39. Out of the 21 female employees, the youngest was 14, while the eldest was a 43-year old widow. The mean working age for females at Banning was 19.²⁸

These figures also reveal the small number of wives employed at Banning Mill. Besides widows, it seems most married women stayed at home with their children. While this may have been uncommon at other mills throughout the South, few married women who lived in the Banning Mill village worked in its factory.²⁹ Instead, wives continued the daily routines of household labor and childcare reminiscent of their duties on the farm. Perhaps this is why women had an easier time adjusting to life in mill villages. They still tended gardens, milked cows, cooked, cleaned, quilted, and canned. However, they were relieved of fieldwork and, at least at Banning, could hire African American laundresses to do the washing. There were also benefits to living in close quarters with relatives or neighbors. Women were able to share household chores. These changes in labor gave women additional free time which they could use to, among other things, visit and attend church more frequently.

Because some farmers’ wives carried traditional duties from the farm with them and continued to enjoy similar leisure activities, it is difficult to determine how much the transition from farm to factory affected these women. For some, the change was refreshing. Billy Driver, a long time Banning resident, remembers his mother saying, “She hated that work on the farm, said she didn’t know what she was missing. It was better working in a cotton mill like that than it was havin’ to

²⁷ Statistics drawn from the Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Carroll County, Georgia.
²⁸ Information compiled from the Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Carroll County, Georgia. On most of the census records, boarders were usually unmarried relatives who worked in the cotton mill.
²⁹ Census records indicate the wives who did work in the factory were mothers of two or fewer children.
farm all the time.”\textsuperscript{30} Scholars point to added pressures of balancing “public work” with housekeeping as sources of tension for women, but at Banning, because most mothers had the benefit of staying at home with their families, this was not the case. Those who did work in the factory seemed to prefer mill work over housework.\textsuperscript{31}

While it is not clear exactly how many women at Banning favored mill village life to farming, it is apparent that their children enjoyed the change. When asked which they preferred, the farm or the factory, interviewees who had lived at Banning as children often stated they enjoyed life in the village. Billy Driver remembers “the [machinery ran] real slow and easy back then and the kids working there would play half the time.”\textsuperscript{32} On the farm boys and girls alike worked in the fields, but in the village children found more time to play in the creek, hunt small animals, fish, and attend the mill’s baseball games. Compared with their duties on the farm, especially at harvest time, work in the mill may have seemed less demanding to young children.\textsuperscript{33}

Male heads of household typically had a more difficult time with the transition than their wives and children. When factories began recruiting entire families, some male farmers felt uneasy about life in the village. Secondary sources suggest the transition was more difficult for men because they seemed to lose some of their authority to management, control over their wife’s and children’s income, and often felt unsatisfied with factory work.\textsuperscript{34}

Men’s old routines from the farm disappeared before their eyes. Historian Melissa Walker writes, “once use to controlling their own time and working at their own pace and direction, they [men] had to become accustomed to the discipline within the factory walls where the days were structured by a time clock and foreman. Men found that the unity between life and work was now disrupted.”\textsuperscript{35} Gone were the days of plowing, planting, and harvesting. For many the draw to the land was too much

\textsuperscript{30} Billy Driver, tape-recorded interview by Stephanie Sims, October 4, 2000, Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
\textsuperscript{31} Newby, 242.
\textsuperscript{32} See Billy Driver interview and McHugh, 46.
\textsuperscript{33} McHugh, 43.
\textsuperscript{34} Newby, 310 and 321.
\textsuperscript{35} Walker, 188.
and numerous husbands transported their families back and forth between the factory and farm year after year until complete economic necessity dictated their surrender to the mill. It was nearly impossible for a man with two or more children to provide for his family on his mill income alone. Perhaps a sense of failure threatened these men as they and/or their wives and children entered the factory.

Once settled in a mill village like Banning, men, women, and children from farms began socializing in different ways. Wives clung to other females with common concerns and assisted each other in household duties, such as quilting, cooking, and caring for others. They found more time and financial resources to decorate trees for Christmas, prepare special meals for holidays, and talk on the porch. Their children discovered a whole range of new friends to play with on the job, during baseball games, on the ridges, and in the millrace. Whereas youngsters on farms had little choice with whom they socialized, apart from siblings, children in villages had the opportunity to play with boys and girls of their own age.36

Living in Banning’s mill village and later on a nearby farm, Minnie Brown’s favorite thing about the village was “playing with children when I was young as there was plenty of children to be with” and “being able to see my friends every day.”37 The new centralization of neighborhoods also allowed teenagers the freedom to gather throughout the week with members of the opposite sex. Although still chaperoned by parents, and even more daunting, by an entire community, young men and women probably found a wider variety of possible partners within the village. Socializing on the porch, at church, on the job, and during house dances allowed young adults the opportunity to meet a wide range of new individuals, people they may have never come in contact with on the farm. For men, newfound leisure time included frequent outings to the company store and saloons for tall tales and gambling. Unlike their wives’ productive social activities, men engaged in forms of escapism, finding solace with

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36 As mentioned before, it was uncommon for farm children to visit neighbors alone.
other men. While playing cards, loitering, and drinking relieved men of household stresses and the drudgery of factory work, their participation in such activities did not benefit their families.

While migrants found new opportunities to socialize in mill villages, some of the entertainment was the same or similar to social activities available to farm families. Candy pullings, singings, dances, school recitals, and revivals were common activities for both farmers and millhands. Newspapers reporting on Banning and the surrounding community cite candy pullings and house parties where “a good time was enjoyed by all.” Oral histories from both farms and millhands along with newspapers describe community singings where several congregations would gather at a local church for a full day of music and a dinner on the grounds. Articles advertising school recitals at Banning’s mill church include names of children living in both the village and on local farms. Although more frequent in villages than on farms, the familiarity of these events may have comforted and pleased those who made the transition between farm life and public work.

Occasional house dances would draw teenagers from both the farm and mill. Maynard Hanson, whose father owned the local saw mill at Banning, recalled having “a square dance every fourteenth of February” at her farm near the mill village. Hanson remembers, “square dances were the big thing at that time.” Ruth Smith, a mill village resident, also remembers “dances in peoples’ homes. They’d take a bed down, clean out the living room and have a dance. They had boys that would play the fiddle and the guitars. They had good music and Lord I would just dance!” Participants might also sprinkle “cornmeal on the floors to make a better sliding surface.” On farms, “these dances, distinct from courting rituals, were family affairs, with children running about

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38 See the Carroll County Times, May 7, 1914, and the Carroll Free Press, April 16, 1925, for stories on candy pullings.
39 Carroll Free Press, April 22, 1927.
40 Everett Tolbert and Maynard Hanson, tape-recorded interview by Arden Williams and Violet Miles, October 12, 1999, Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
41 Ruth Smith, tape-recorded interview by author, November 12, 2002, Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
42 Sharpless, 192–3.
until they fell asleep, exhausted, in adjoining bedrooms.”43 While these types of house dances were family-oriented on the farm, it seems they were organized strictly for courting purposes in rural mill villages. Oral histories suggest house dances were particularly enjoyable for unmarried teenagers and newlyweds.44 Because distance was not an issue in mill villages, young parents could leave children at home with their parents or neighbors. For unmarried millhands, square dances provided good opportunities to court, as house parties occurred close to home but away from the watchful eyes of adults.

Teenagers at Banning were not different from their counterparts on farms when it came to the natural attractions they felt towards one another. A millhand or lucky farmer (if neither were Fundamentalists) who spent his or her Saturday night on the dance floor would consider that time well spent. Surely teenagers from both rural mill villages and farms attending their first dance became just as anxious and excited as high school students on prom night. The simple anticipation of the event created an escape from parents, work, or caring for younger siblings. Young men might daydream on the shop floor or in the field while their female companions would primp in preparation. Dances in villages and the countryside seem to have been significant to and highly appreciated by their participants.45

Although house parties were popular and drew jovial crowds, they were not the most common form of socialization in the countryside and mill village. According to historian Pete Daniel, “church was the center of the community. Picnics and Sunday services broke up the week and allowed rural families to meet and enjoy fellowship.”46 For many, it was the primary form of recreation. Adults socialized afterwards while teenagers paired off and courted and children played with friends.

Sharecroppers and their busy families attended church infrequently. Either from lack of time, distance, or absence of suitable attire, farming families in general did not attend church

43 Ibid. 193.
44 Banning Mill Oral History Collection, Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
45 Ibid.
46 Daniel,Breaking the Land, 191.
every Sunday.\textsuperscript{47} Women who were pregnant often lacked proper maternity wear and, after their feet began to swell, usually went without shoes. This condition embarrassed many mothers and kept them from attending weekly services.

This is not to say pregnant millhands always had church attire, attended church weekly, or even ventured outside after their bellies were too large to conceal. It is simply more likely mill village residents had fewer distracting factors at work and more leisure opportunities which allowed them to attend church weekly if they so desired. Whether they went to church for religious and spiritual purposes, to be entertained and socialize, or to be seen by the landowner or mill boss, the distance between one’s house and church did not affect millhands’ attendance decisions as it did farmers’. Millhands did not have the same excuses cited by farmers, muddy roads and fieldwork, because the short distance from the church (usually a mile or less) and factory jobs (Banning was closed on Sundays) never prevented village residents from attending church.\textsuperscript{48}

Religion was an important factor in the lives of both rural farmers and cotton mill workers. Some consider religion a tradition, others a genuine reflection of the heart. For millhands and farmers, church events served as both uplifting agents (religious ecstasy) and as forms of entertainment. Hazel Riley, a Texas farm wife interviewed “commented, ‘the preaching and the music attracted even those who were not interested in salvation. ‘The people, having lived out on farms all year, were starved for music and drama. They came in droves. Those who were not religious inclined went for association and entertainment, and most of the time they were not disappointed.’”\textsuperscript{49}

Banning’s residents could choose from among three local churches. Antioch Primitive Baptist was founded in 1855 and remodeled in 1878 under new ownership. St. Paul’s church, most likely Methodist, was founded in 1887. Corinth Baptist, located closest to the factory today, was established in 1893 by village residents as a church and schoolhouse. It was not

\textsuperscript{47} Hagood, 12–14, 23, 170–175.
\textsuperscript{48} Banning Mill Oral History Collection.
\textsuperscript{49} Sharpless, 214.
uncommon for these churches to get together throughout the year for revivals, which included baptisms, picnics, and singings.\textsuperscript{50}

Held both on the weekends and throughout the week, revivals would draw almost every member of the community to one local church. As a child, mill village resident Barbara Gentry attended “revivals that lasted for two to three weeks. There would be so many people there, people standing outside, inside, and sitting in windows.”\textsuperscript{51} It seems as if every summer one of the churches at Banning hosted “a good revival. Different preachers preached, we had a pastor, but they had different ones during the revival. We always had a good service.”\textsuperscript{52} Paul Henry, another resident at Banning, also remembers a variety of speakers at the revivals. “They had all denominations, not just Baptist or Methodist. They had Holiness meetings there, Baptist meetings, whatever kind of preacher come along that wanted to church, he could preach there.”\textsuperscript{53} Millhands did not seem picky; most wanted a lively service that would either uplift or entertain them. Banning employee Floyd Smith remembers sitting in the front row praying while people were hollering and speaking in tongues all around him.\textsuperscript{54} For most people in the South, attending church was a tradition upheld come hell or high water.

Yet unlike wealthier residents in town, the mill community enthusiastically embraced livelier displays of spiritual devotion.\textsuperscript{55} Several historians have suggested this preference was based on location and economic status.\textsuperscript{56} But if one takes into consideration the lack of leisure activities during the week, it is easy to see why factory employees or sharecroppers relished an opportunity to

\textsuperscript{50} Dates and religious events pulled from numerous articles in the \textit{Carroll County Times}.
\textsuperscript{51} Barbara Gentry, tape-recorded interview by Stephanie Sims, October 3, 2000. Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
\textsuperscript{52} Ruth Smith interview, November 12, 2002.
\textsuperscript{53} Paul Henry, tape-recorded interview by Stephanie Sims, October 4, 2000. Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
\textsuperscript{54} Floyd Smith, tape-recorded interview by Stephanie Sims, October 6, 2000. Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
\textsuperscript{55} Differences in religious preferences between mill villages and town centers are discussed in David Carlton’s \textit{Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880–1920} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994).
\textsuperscript{56} Both David Carlton’s \textit{Mill and Town in South Carolina: 1880–1920} and William Copper and Thomas Terrill’s \textit{The American South: A History, Volume II} discuss this preference.
jump, shout, and sing to God all week long. Revivals could bring both spiritual and physiological renewal to farmers and millhands. Desperate for a release from strenuous working conditions, revival participants utilized the few hours they had during the week to attend nightly sermons.57 Knowing they would be tired the next day, workers still sacrificed their precious time to participate in meaningful spiritual events.

Besides traditional forms of leisure, house parties, church services, and revivals, which were enjoyed with little differences between farm and village, Banning’s residents continued to celebrate special holidays. Christmas, Thanksgiving, and the Fourth of July provided welcome changes to farm and factory workers’ daily routines. An increase in social events usually occurred around these holidays.58 While specific traditions within the homes of farmers in the area were not identified in the Banning Oral History Collection, one assumes church gatherings and large meals were part of the celebrations.59

During the Christmas season at Banning Mill, a group of millhands, usually wives and their young children, spent their free time decorating the church’s Christmas tree. Ruth Smith grew up at Banning and remembers that ornaments were often made from “string popcorn and stuff like that. We’d make our ornaments and put them on the Christmas tree. We took flour and water and made it stick, made little rings out of paper. Then we’d get cedar and holly wood berries on it.”60 Both Betty Cauley, who also grew up at Banning, and Ruth Smith remember their mothers spending long hours in the kitchen fixing mouthwatering meals for Christmas. Mrs. Cauley would cook ten cakes and store them in her pie safe, while Smith’s family “didn’t get too much in gifts, but we always had something good to eat. We’ve had neighbors over and we’d eat with other people, it was just like family.”61

57 Banning Mill Oral History Collection.
58 Ibid.
59 “The ways in which farmers celebrated holidays was outside the scope of this project and the author did not find references to Christmas, Thanksgiving, or the Fourth of July in any of the secondary sources utilized.
60 Ruth Smith interview, November 12, 2002.
61 Betty Cauley, tape-recorded interview by Stephanie Sims, October 2, 2000, Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia. Ruth Smith interview, November 12, 2002.
Sometime during the Christmas holiday, employees at Banning took their children to the local church and passed out gifts. Children living on farms and in mill villages typically received fruit, an orange or an apple, a few pieces of candy, and possibly nuts and raisins. Few residents at Banning spoke of other gifts. On the rare occasion parents could afford more elaborate presents, boys might get a harmonica, a jackknife, or a stopper gun, while their sisters received baby dolls.62

During the company Christmas party, village resident Paul Henry recalls “all the grown people would bring all the children [to the church] and build a fire in the pot belly stove. Then they’d [the company would] give out the presents for the children.”63 Ruth Smith remembers a mill superintendent dressing up like Santa Claus one year. Since a stranger dressed like Saint Nick was probably an uncommon sight to young children, she recalled the costumed boss “scare[d] us to death! We weren’t use to nothing like that and when he came up there [to the church] the kids would run every which way!”64

Traditional gatherings held within homes and at the church during Christmas gave families a break from their strenuous routine at the farm or mill. While it can be assumed holiday celebrations on farms centered on individual families, yearly Christmas parties at local churches became events which the entire community eagerly awaited. Ruth Smith fondly recalled, “Come Christmas time, everyone at Banning was there.”65

Thanksgiving was also a time for gathering in homes and sharing scarce resources. Although the millhands received time off, this holiday was often difficult for families who could not provide their children with the traditional turkey dinner. Unlike farming families who were more self-sufficient, mill families had to rely on one another and on the generosity of paternalistic owners. As a child, one operative recalled, “one Thanksgiving, they [a superintendent’s family] gave my dad and my mother their leftover turkey dinner. I mean, that was big, big stuff for poor people. Big old piece of turkey. At that time, I guess my

62 Paul Henry interview.
63 Ibid.
64 Ruth Smith interview, November 12, 2002.
65 Ibid.
youngest brother had already been born so they was six boys.”

This generosity, although common throughout southern mill villages, quite possibly embarrassed former farmers. Parents who had previously raised their own food now relied on supervisors’ leftovers to provide a Thanksgiving meal for their large families.

Paternalists who felt responsible for the well-being of their operatives provided families with meals at Thanksgiving and gifts during Christmas. Charitable owners understood this tradition could help create goodwill at relatively little cost. When asked about the benevolence of the mill company at Banning, village resident Paul Henry answered, “Well, it was good community relations for the people that worked. That showed them that they cared for you. It made people feel better.” Whether parents interpreted the owners’ benevolence as charity or sincere gifts varied. Husbands especially may have been self-conscious of their families’ dependence on owners. Despite millhands’ opinions of paternalism, the contributions of management during Thanksgiving and Christmas seemed to have softened the blow working class families faced when celebrating these holidays.

Like Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July differed for millhands because of company-sponsored events. While it is unclear exactly how farmers in the community spent this holiday, it seems certain migrants to the mill found it new and exciting. On the Fourth of July, Banning gave its’ employees the day off, sponsored a barbecue, and hosted baseball tournaments. When asked about her favorite holiday at Banning, Ruth Smith replied, “The Fourth of July was our biggest one here. They always had something on the Fourth of July for all the employees. We would

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66 C. D. Smith, tape-recorded interview by Stephanie Sims, October 6, 2000. Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
67 Paul Henry interview.
68 Again, the ways in which farmers celebrated holidays was outside the scope of this project and the author did not find references to holiday celebrations in any of the secondary sources utilized. When interviewees who had lived on farms before moving to Banning were asked what their families did on the Fourth of July outside of the village, most of them did not remember a specific activity. Thus, it remains uncertain whether or not interviewees’ memories deceived them or Fourth of July celebrations were limited to mill villages or towns.
69 Ethel Richardson, tape-recorded interview by Stephanie Sims, February 7, 2001. Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
have a picnic and everyone would eat and drink together. Lots of stuff to eat, we just get together, laugh and talk, that is all we know to do. Generally have it at the church.” The company usually provided all the food at the picnic, including local favorites like Brunswick stew and pulled pork sandwiches. This generosity meant residents were free to enjoy their extra time at the picnic or baseball game, rather than at work or in the kitchen. Unlike celebrations on the farm, women did not have to worry about food preparation and men did not have to work in the fields. By giving operatives the day off and providing lunch, the company-sponsored picnic made the Fourth of July one of the more relaxing and enjoyable holidays at Banning.

A double header baseball game usually followed the annual Fourth of July picnic. While baseball itself may have been familiar to farmers, a company-sponsored team with official uniforms and equipment was certainly a new phenomenon. From 1914 into the 1940s, Banning’s owners sponsored a company team often referred to as the “Banning Nine.” Their most popular games were against the neighboring town of Whitesburg. Men, women, and children would gather at the company field to cheer for Banning’s baseball team. “Oh Lord, we had a good team here!” Ruth Smith recalled. “I hollered for them so much my throat was so sore I couldn’t swallow. We just had the best

70 Ruth Smith interview, November 12, 2002.
71 Alton Stitcher, tape-recorded interview by author, November 8, 2002. Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
72 Bobby Argo, tape-recorded interview by Arden Williams, October 20, 1999. Center for Public History State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia and excerpts from the Carroll County Times, May 14, 1914, through April 11, 1940. On May 14, 1914, a Whitesburg reporter wrote, “we must say that this Banning crowd are very civil set of ball players, and we admire the generous spirit of these two gentlemen at the factory, who go with their boys and look after them. ‘Verily they shall have their reward’. Beyond the accident of Mr. Lloyd Duncan of Whitesburg being hit upon the head by a ball, thrown by Mr. B Henry, a Banning pitcher, and knocked down and stunned for some minutes, but not killed, or seriously injured, and Mr. Mose Watkins, a Banning boy having his collar bone dislocated, and Mr. Henry Rooks of Whitesburg receiving a lick on his ankle which lamed, but did not lay him up, and a colored boy, a spectator, being struck on the arm by the ball, the game was very pleasant one with only a modicum of caviling and disputation, everything sober and civil.” The players from Banning were Paul Tolbert, Dot Upson, Grover Henry, A.O. Colquitt, Mr. Collins, B. Henry, Albert Motes, Bob Horton, John Watts, and Tom Morris.
time hollering for our ball team, and we had a good one, won all the games around here!”  

Ruth Smith was not the only one excited about the team. Baseball games fostered community and company pride and allowed residents to get caught up in something besides work. Their financial troubles might disappear if only briefly as they watched their next-door neighbor hit a home run or tag an opponent out. As there was no charge to attend, traditional baseball games became many of the free or inexpensive ways the community exercised its leisure time. Fan and player C. D. Smith said it best, “we were all fanatics about our baseball!”

While women may have received assistance with meals during the holidays, day-to-day life still revolved around cooking, cleaning, and caring for others. When someone in the community fell ill or was injured at work, it was typical for wives of both farmers and millhands to prepare meals for the sick. Ruth Smith remembers her mother using her time in such a way. “Mother was good to her neighbors; she’d cook if anyone got sick and carry stew to them.” On the farm, this type of assistance often meant women had to spend days at a time away from their own homes caring for others. In the village, if someone was sick and his or her neighbor did not have time to carry something to them, the neighbor’s door was always open. “We didn’t think about closing our doors and if the next door neighbor was sick and needed anything, it was there for them if we had it and the same way with them. You know, back and forth.” Both scenarios illustrate the community’s commitment to care for one another. In the village, individuals did not have to carry the load alone; when families were in need, women rallied together to provide for their neighbors. The personal touch of hand delivering goods was less practical on the farm, but within the village, even residents short on time had the comfort of knowing they could provide for others on short notice.

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73 Ruth Smith interview, November 12, 2002. Despite Ruth’s fond memory, the Carroll County Times reports many losses for Banning’s baseball team during her time at Banning.

74 Wilson Holder, T. W. Tolbert, Floyd Smith, and C. D. Smith all spoke of the free games during their interviews. Quote from C. D. Smith interview.

75 Ruth Smith interview, November 12, 2002.

76 Billy Driver interview.
Women living in Banning’s mill village also gathered to quilt, a typical method of socializing on the farm. When he was a young child, village resident Billy Driver remembers going to a quilting party with his mother. “There’d be five or six women sitting around there with a big dip of snuff and quilting and telling, you know, gossip and everything.” Billy would crawl around under the quilt while the women were working on it. “I could hear them talking and all. Ya, they’d have a good time. That is where they caught up on everything I guess.”77 Gatherings for women could happen more frequently in mill villages than in farm communities.78 Because neighbors were nearby, women spent more time in the village exchanging gossip, gathering local news, quilting, canning, and socializing in general.

Whether caring for sick neighbors or working in groups, the accomplishments of women’s shared leisure time served multiple functions within the village. Quilting parties allowed women to vent frustrations, share concerns, and, of course, catch up on the local gossip. Aside from the pleasure they brought women, quilting parties also serve as a prime example of the productive ways women utilized their free time. Quilts have an important function within the home and increase the comfort of those in it. Unlike men, women continued to use their free time to assist others or provide necessities for their families.

While women’s social activities typically revolved around work, men spent their leisure time outside of the home and factory. Coping with the transition from farm to factory, men continued to release tensions and socialize by drinking and gambling. Reserved for the masculine sex, participants often overindulged in the use of alcohol and cards when they were available. To the downfall of many men and their families, both were readily accessible at Banning. During Prohibition, the creation and consumption of moonshine or whiskey did not cease in the village.79 It is likely frequent changes in management prevented owners

77 Ibid.
78 Rebecca Sharpless, in her discussion of women farmers, states, “quilting was an activity carried out alone or with one’s daughters…social events related to quilt making waxed and waned in popularity throughout the early twentieth century,” Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices, 100.
79 Banning Mill Oral History Collection.
from abolishing this practice. Banning’s third owner, Arthur Hutcheson, ran the mill from 1878 until his death in 1895, after which his family continued to control the business from a distance. During this time, J. R. Lassiter worked as the mill’s head supervisor. Unlike Hutcheson, he was not remembered as paternalistic. At the beginning of the Prohibition era, the family sold the mill to Poncet Davis who supported a mill baseball team but closed the company store. Ownership transitions and new managerial styles probably prevented authority figures from cracking down on illegal drinking within the village.

Bobby Argo, who has lived at Banning all his life, recalled “every Friday night when they [the men] got paid, they’d go out in the woods and build them a fire and start gambling and drinking. They’d start getting in a fight and they’d go cutting and shooting one another. I used to, when I was a kid, dread to see the weekend come, somebody’d get shot or cut.” Another local, Paul Henry, remembered, “there were five taverns all within half a mile” of the village. In some cases, residents who owned their own stills would secretly convert their houses into saloons. When asked if anyone had moonshine at Banning during the twenties, Paul Henry responded, “my dad!” Supposedly Henry’s father made a batch one time that was so strong “all the men, just about couldn’t drink it and we had to burn it.” C. D. Smith and Paul Henry never considered drinking “a big deal.” “I remember a lot of moonshine. My daddy drank; well, just about all the men drank.” For many men, especially those who enjoyed socializing in groups, drinking was a common pastime easily perpetuated in mill villages.

Drinking and gambling continued to provide most working men with a release from the transition from farm to factory, including the harsh working conditions, economic worries at home, and challenges to established gender roles. Mixed with

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80 Ownership information compiled from the Carroll County Times and the Carroll Free Press, 1887–1921.
81 Bobby Argo interview.
82 Paul Henry interview.
83 Ibid.
84 C.D. Smith interview.
85 Paul Henry interview.
the natural effects of alcohol, conversation with other men was therapeutic. Drinking at a saloon or gambling with friends gave millhands time to daydream and escape reality. The usefulness of this activity is arguable, especially from their wives’ perspective, but its utility was similar to the pleasures women felt when quilting in groups or gossiping with neighbors.

A less destructive form of recreation, gathering at the company store, had been a simple joy for male farmers. Groups might gather to swap stories, play checkers, strum guitars, and purchase necessary supplies. Farmers usually traveled to town alone or in the company of their oldest son. This was typically the case because husbands were in charge of the financial resources and how they were spent. Women made lists of the things they needed then waited anxiously for their husbands’ return, for even the most levelheaded business woman found it difficult to get into town with children in tow.86

Once families were relocated to mill villages, this simple form of recreation was available to all members of the family. Parents who were short on time could send their children to the company store, which was less than a mile away, or go themselves. This new freedom allowed women to rely less on men to pick out clothing or fabric. It also permitted rambunctious youngsters a chance to get out of the house. On the farm, children had few recreational engagements. While “they had pets, played games, and roamed”87 they relied on their parents for the majority of their social opportunities. On the other hand, children living in mill villages, if they were not running errands to the store, working in the factory, attending school, caring for livestock, or cooking, enjoyed new forms of leisure.

Playtime at Banning usually consisted of outings with parents or older siblings, baseball games with friends, or a dip in the creek. Ruth Smith laughed when she recalled skinny-dipping in Snake Creek, Banning Mill’s natural power source, with her friends. “One Sunday, we was just children, we was dipping snuff, sitting on a big old rock in the sun and decided we wanted to go across the creek. We pulled off our clothes and crossed the creek. We’d like to froze, but we had to come back and get our clothes! No

86 Hagood, 160.
87 Kirby, 301.
Most of the men interviewed were young residents at Banning between 1910 and the 1930s. They remember a combination of swimming, hunting, fishing, and playing ball with their friends and fathers. As a boy, Everett Tolbert and his friends “went fishing in Snake Creek and we went swimming and then we’d play baseball.” A relative of Everett, T. W. Tolbert, similarly recalls, “we’d ramble in the creek all the time; that’s all we had to do was ramble in the creek and hunt acorn nuts and squirrels.”

Paul Henry recalled with keen insight, “People had a good time back then. I enjoyed myself when I was growing up. Kids and teenagers was a whole lot easier to please back then than they are now. We were satisfied with almost anything.” He also remembers with fondness spending time with his father at Snake Creek. “My daddy use to make turtle boxes to catch turtles in. And I use to go with him when I was a little boy. He’d take me and my oldest brother with him when he’d go around and check his turtle boxes.” Although this might have been a chore for his father, surely Paul and his older brother enjoyed the outing. Such social activities gave young men a rare chance to bond with their fathers, to escape from household duties, and the drudgery of working in the mill.

One of the most popular new forms of entertainment available in mill villages, silent movies, were enjoyed by both children and adults. On occasional Saturday nights in the 1920s, millhands could pay a dime to watch popular silent movies with their friends. Bobby Argo recalls these were usually Westerns. The tent theater was located “at the other side of the weave shop, on

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88 Ruth Smith, tape-recorded interview by Violet Miles, July 14, 1999. Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
89 Everett Tolbert, tape-recorded interview by Violet Miles, July 27, 1999. Center for Public History, State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
90 T. W. Tolbert, tape-recorded interview by Stephanie Sims, October 30, 2000. Center for Public History State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
91 Paul Henry interview.
92 Bobby Argo talked briefly about traveling tent shows and silent movies in his 2004 follow-up interview. The interview was conducted by the author and Beau Brummett in February 2004. The original was accidentally destroyed in the process of being copied. For more information on silent movies at Banning Mill, see Minnie Brown’s tape recorded interview with author recorded by phone April 1, 2004.
top of the hill [about a mile from the factory].” The movie was “turned with a crank and shown on a board.”93 Once or twice a year, both children and adults had the opportunity to attend traveling shows which included moving images. These events did not exclude farmers, but because they set up in community centers, movies were more accessible to village residents. Paul Henry remembers, “everybody who could get there would come there and see them shows. There wasn’t no other place they could go to see nothing like that and if people knew about it, they would try to make arrangements to go see it because it was really something to see!”94 Traveling shows in the 1920s and 1930s were so special that workers would rearrange their schedules to make time to attend.95 They could escape into alternate universes of wealth and romance, daydreaming about being the hero or damsel of the film and, for a precious few hours, forgetting about their less-than-romantic lives within the factory.

While movies had a large impact on millhands, the most significant change in leisure came in the form of daily visiting. Once isolated on farms, village residents enjoyed opportunities to gather daily on porches throughout the neighborhood to exchange gossip, listen to music, sing songs, court, and play games. When there was not a special event planned, young men and women shared their free time on the porch. Since many love-birds met on the job or were neighbors to their sweethearts, gathering on the porch to socialize with friends was a comfortable activity for couples.96 Sometimes they would “laugh and talk and play games” or “get together and have a singing.”97 This traditional use of leisure time was passed on by parents.

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93 T. W. Tolbert interview.
94 Paul Henry interview.
95 In the 1940s, mill hands who could catch a ride to town attended movies and shows in the nearby town of Whitesburg. Paul Brown and Joe Head recalled many happy memories during these excursions. Paul and Minnie Brown, email correspondence with author. Joe Head, tape-recorded interview with author, April 5, 2004. Center for Public History at the State University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.
96 Floyd Smith’s mother was one of the many interviewees who recalled themselves and/or their parents meeting their future spouses on the job. Floyd Smith’s mother had a crush on her future husband when she met him in the factory at Banning. Floyd remembers her mother saying she was too shy to tell him how she felt and finally employed one of her girlfriends to reveal the news to him. Floyd Smith interview.
97 Ruth Smith interview, November 12, 2002.
who also visited on the porch with friends. Even as children, residents remember hearing individuals singing on the porch. Paul Henry spoke of a girl named Mary whose parents “had a swing on the front porch. Mary had the loudest voice that you ever heard. She sang church songs from the time she was eight until she was thirteen years old. She’d get out there and swing on that swing and sing. You could hear her just as plain as if she had been right there standing next to ya.”

In their interviews, residents from Banning often recalled individuals like Mary who gained respect and admiration with their musical talents. Residents who could play a mean banjo or harmonize with a guitar were popular entertainers during porch visits.

While it did occur more often than on the farm, visiting on the porch was brief during the week. “We didn’t do it often because everyone was tired after climbing that hill after work. People didn’t stay up late at night, you had to get up and work. About eight or nine o’clock at least, you didn’t stay up later than that.”

Because they were weary after ten or twelve hours in the factory, millhands made sure they made good use of their free time on the weekends.

Brief or occasional, when compared to the amount of free time enjoyed by farmers, millhands had more. Not only did they participate in traditional forms of leisure, church services, revivals, house dances, candy pullings, and singings, village residents also had access to new kinds of entertainment. Company-sponsored events, baseball games, and silent movies drew large crowds.

Historians can learn a great deal about the South’s period of transition from agriculture to industry by examining the ways in which mill village residents used their free time. The continuation of traditional forms of entertainment almost certainly helped individuals cope with the changes brought about by the transition. Although men, women, and children had different ways of coming to terms with evolving gender expectations and unfamiliar working conditions, both of which threatened a patriarchal model prevalent on southern tenant farms, they all seemed

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98 Paul Henry interview.
99 Banning Mill Oral History Collection.
100 Ruth Smith interview, November 12, 2002.
to have been comforted by the persistence of familiar recreations. The community continued to gather at the church for Christmas and families still enjoyed turkey dinners on Thanksgiving. More frequently, men persisted with alcohol and cards; women maintained quilting traditions from the countryside, and children found freedom outdoors.

In addition to a continuation of familiar types of recreation, millhands embraced emerging forms of popular culture. According to the oral histories, village residents fiercely loyal to their company-sponsored baseball team and would never dare miss an opportunity to see them play. When new amusements found their way to Banning, they were embraced with enthusiasm and awe. Before the radio ever reached the rural community, silent movies entertained large numbers of millhands.

A comparison of leisure activities at Banning Mill reveals more than a continuation of comforting rituals and popular entertainments. Both traditional and new forms of leisure at Banning Mill expose individuals’ tendencies to socialize with members of their own sex and age. No longer dependent on their families for entertainment, women, men, teenagers, and children congregated together for holidays, but usually spent most of their free time divided by gender.

An examination of gendered recreation also suggests men had unspoken difficulties coping with the transition from farm to factory. While women’s leisure typically revolved around work, men dealt with their new surroundings by escaping reality. Wives’ commitment to their families and to productive uses of their free time sharply contrasts with husbands’ preferred after-work habits. Men squandered money on moonshine and cards, and, less dangerously, passed their time swapping stories at the company store. While men found solace in one another, their leisure activities typically benefited themselves. Unlike women who, by their labor, created more free time on the farm for men and continued to use their extra hours in the village providing for their family, men, outside of factory work, were largely unproductive members of society. On the other hand, husbands and young men working ten to twelve hours a day in the factory needed some sort of mental release. Drastically different kinds of labor required by the cotton mill and a challenge to the patriarchal model certainly weighed heavily on male employees.
Perhaps these are the primary reasons why most husbands felt uncomfortable in their new surroundings. At Banning Mill, few women worked in the factory. Wives’ routines from the farm remained, for the most part, in tact. This was not true for men. They found factory work unfamiliar and clung to traditional recreation. While not an excuse, the concept does help scholars understand why men sought avenues of escape amongst themselves that were often counterproductive.

A comparison of leisure activities by location, farm and village, and gender, specifically husband and wife, allows scholars to understand the different ways in which individuals adapted to and dealt with the transition from agriculture to industry. While Banning Mill has its own unique history, it resembles other rural mill villages in the Georgia Piedmont. Men, women, teenagers, and children enjoyed traditional and new forms of entertainment, however each embraced or struggled with the transition from farm to factory in very different ways.