

We Were Mount Pleasant

[BY ANNE SHULER TOOLE]

In the mid-1970s, Betty Lee Johnson interviewed dozens of seniors living in the East Cooper area, learning about the history of this area as people lived it – things you won't find in any history book. The stories were one of the most popular weekly features of the *East Cooper Pilot*, which closed its doors in 1979. Johnson compiled the interviews into two books in the late 1980s: "As I Remember It: An Oral History of the East Cooper Area" and "As I Remember It: Volume II." The stories are priceless personal tales of the small town of Mount Pleasant and its surrounding communities. Those who narrated have long since passed, yet their words still bring life to their memories of when they were Mount Pleasant.

ESTHER ROYALL GREGORIE

Born September 1891

Esther Gregorie grew up on Hibben Street near the ferry landing.

"Mount Pleasant was a small, isolated community where life was simple and everyone was either related to or good friends with everyone else," she said. The neighborhood children found ways to entertain themselves with games like baseball, basketball or shinny outside, or indoor games like parcheesi or lotto."

The streets were bustling with activity in those days, she recalled. Farmers from all over town and as far north as McClellanville would drive cows down Georgetown Road – now Highway 17 – down to the Hibben Street wharf.



"It was very exciting for those of us who lived on Hibben Street but also scary to have those cows come swarming up in front of the house," she recounted.

An organ grinder with a monkey dressed in a colorful coat would come annually; the man would grind a tune while the monkey danced and held out a tin cup for pennies. Gregorie remembered all of the local children



following him like he was the Pied Piper. The ice cream man would occasionally make the trip from Charleston, selling it by the block; he also picked up a large following of children.

In 1922, Esther married Ferdinand Gregorie and moved to the centuries-old home at Oakland Plantation. Guests used the window panes as a "register" and etched their names into the glass with diamonds and other items, some dating as far back as 1773. She lived in the house for the rest of her life.



MAGGIE SANDERS JEFFERSON

Born October 1897

Maggie Jefferson was born at home in Christ Church Parish – now part of Mount Pleasant – and attended a one-room school at Four Mile Road. She quit school in the third grade to care for her younger siblings and handle the cooking, washing and ironing, which was done with water she hauled and boiled over an open fire.

She picked up bundles of fresh-cut asparagus from a neighbor's field for 50 cents a day, but the money went a long way.

"You could buy sugar for three cents, salt for 2 cents and a quart of rice for 3 cents. Lard was four trays for 25 cents, so we got along good on a little money," she said.

She began "courting" at 15 years old and courted her future husband, Walter, for about a year before they married. In those days, she explained, a boy would ride a horse to a girl's house while the sun was high and sit in the living room with the family around because girls weren't supposed to go out alone with a boy. On holidays, they attended dances from noon to sundown at a "big white hall," which was located where the now-demolished former Wando High School once stood.

After marriage, she took care of their four children and the housework, but, following Walter's passing in 1942, she worked on a farm with her three youngest children, helping pick vegetables after school.

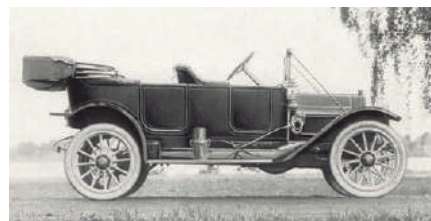
"As I got older, the children took care of me. I can say I had a good life. I had a very good man; I guess that's why I never remarried," she said.

DR. BOONE BOWEN

Born Aug. 5, 1899

Dr. Boone Bowen has fond memories growing up in Mount Pleasant when its population was about 1,400 people. A lot of his social life as a boy centered around Hibben Methodist Church and its events like ice cream sales, oyster roasts, oyster-stew sales and his favorite: the annual Sunday school picnic at the pavilion in Isle of Palms. The church chartered a trolley, and families would pack a basket of food, rent facilities in the bathhouses and enjoy the beach, Ferris wheel and merry-go-round in addition to competing in foot races and sack races.

One of his earliest memories was the automobile. Cars were so rare, he said, that children would run out on their porches to watch one go by. His father bought a car in 1912 but wasn't sure it would suit his needs, so he kept his horses and buggy for several months. All of the roads were made of oyster shells or sand at the time, and Bowen recalled the ruts being so deep on what is now Highway 17 that once the car was in the ruts, there was no need to steer.



"Mount Pleasant was a delightful place in which to live when I was a boy. Everyone knew everyone else. In the summer, we fished and swam at the foot of Venning Street. We had a nice beach in those days," he added. 🌿